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The Wine Spectator California Winemen Oral History Series

David S. Stare

FUMÉ BLANC AND MERITAGE WINES IN SONOMA COUNTY:
DRY CREEK VINEYARD'S PIONEER WINEMAKING

Interviews Conducted by
Carole Hicke
in 1996

Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the Nation. Oral history is a method of collecting historical information through tape-recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The tape recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is indexed, bound with photographs and illustrative materials, and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

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Berkeley, 1996.



David Stare, ca. 1990.

Catalog Information

STARE, David S. (b. 1939)

Winery owner and winemaker

Fumé Blanc and Meritage Wines in Sonoma County: Dry Creek Vineyard's Pioneer Winemaking, 1996, vii, 83 pp.

Civil engineering background; early interest in wine, and Wine and Cheese Cask in Boston; studying enology at UC Davis; Dry Creek Valley wineries, buying property; making Fumé Blanc; label design; Zinfandel.

Interviewed in 1996 by Carole Hicke for the Wine Spectator California Wine Oral History Series, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

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PREFACE

The California wine industry oral history series, a project of the Regional Oral History Office, was initiated by Ruth Teiser in 1969 through the action and with the financing of the Wine Advisory Board, a state marketing order organization which ceased operation in 1975. In 1983 it was reinstated as The Wine Spectator California Winemen Oral History Series with donations from The Wine Spectator Scholarship Foundation. The selection of those to be interviewed has been made by a committee consisting of the director of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; John A. De Luca, president of the Wine Institute, the statewide winery organization; Maynard A. Amerine, Emeritus Professor of Viticulture and Enology, University of California, Davis; the current chairman of the board of directors of the Wine Institute; Carole Hicke, series project director; and Marvin R. Shanken, trustee of The Wine Spectator Scholarship Foundation.

Until her death in June 1994, Ruth Teiser was project originator, initiator, director, and conductor of the greater part of the oral histories. Her book, Winemaking in California, co-authored with Catherine Harroun and published in 1982, was the product of more than forty years of research, interviewing, and photographing. (Those wine history files are now in The Bancroft Library for researcher use.) Ruth Teiser's expertise and knowledge of the wine industry contributed significantly to the documenting of its history in this series.

The purpose of the series is to record and preserve information on California grape growing and winemaking that has existed only in the memories of wine men. In some cases their recollections go back to the early years of this century, before Prohibition. These recollections are of particular value because the Prohibition period saw the disruption of not only the industry itself but also the orderly recording and preservation of records of its activities. Little has been written about the industry from late in the last century until Repeal. There is a real paucity of information on the Prohibition years (1920-1933), although some commercial winemaking did continue under supervision of the Prohibition Department. The material in this series on that period, as well as the discussion of the remarkable development of the wine industry in subsequent years will be of aid to historians. Of particular value is the fact that frequently several individuals have discussed the same subjects and events or expressed opinions on the same ideas, each from his or her own point of view.

Research underlying the interviews has been conducted principally in the University libraries at Berkeley and Davis, the California State

Library, and in the library of the Wine Institute, which has made its collection of materials readily available for the purpose.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons who have contributed significantly to recent California history. The office is headed by Willa K. Baum and is under the administrative supervision of The Bancroft Library.

Carole Hicke
Project Director
The Wine Spectator California Winemen
Oral History Series

August 1996
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

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INTERVIEW HISTORY--David S. Stare

David S. Stare, owner and winemaker of Dry Creek Vineyard, was interviewed as part of the Wine Spectator's California Wine Oral History Series to document his career and contributions to the history of California wines.

Dave Stare built his winery in Dry Creek Valley near Healdsburg, California, in 1972, the first of many wineries to locate there in many decades. This long-neglected but historically significant grape-growing valley offered just what Stare was looking for, and he proceeded to make the area's first Sauvignon Blanc varietal--Dry Creek Vineyard Fumé Blanc. Widely hailed as one of California's definitive wines, the Fumé Blanc has become the winery's flagship, but not its only distinguished varietal. Stare also makes other whites and reds of consistently high quality, including Meritage wines and a late harvest Sauvignon Blanc. Dry Creek's sailboat label design is unusual--sailboats on Dry Creek?--and his Bug Creek Vineyard label in 1992 celebrated (or made the best of) the phylloxera invasion.

Stare was interviewed in his office at the winery built, as he requested, to look as if it had been there a hundred years. Dave was interviewed on January 11 and 12, 1996, and he reviewed the transcript making few changes.

This series is part of the ongoing documenting of California history by the Regional Oral History Office, which is under the direction of Willa Baum, Division Head, and under the administrative direction of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Carole Hicke
Project Director

July 29, 1996
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

Regional Oral History Office
Room 486 The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California 94720

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly. Use black ink.)

Your full name David Scott Stare

Date of birth 9/22/39

Birthplace Madison, Wisconsin

Father's full name Fredrick John Stare

Occupation Doctor - Professor

Birthplace Columbus, Wisconsin

Mother's full name Joyce Love Allen

Occupation Librarian

Birthplace Winnfield, Louisiana

Your spouse --

Your children Kim Stare Wallace

Romy Joyce Stare

Where did you grow up? Wellesley, Massachusetts

Present community Healdsburg, California

Education B.S., Civil Engineering, M.I.T.; MBA, Northwestern. One
year graduate work in enology and viticulture at Davis.

Occupation(s) Vintner

Areas of expertise wine marketing and sales

Other interests or activities sailing, golf, food & wine, travel, railroads

Organizations in which you are active Sonoma County Wineries Association,
Nautical Heritage Society

I BACKGROUND AND FAMILY

[Interview 1: January 11, 1996]##¹

Parents

Hicke: Let's just start this afternoon with when, and where you were born.

Stare: I was born in Madison, Wisconsin on September 22, 1939.

Hicke: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents?

Stare: My dad [Fredrick Stare] was, when I was born, a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin--or he had some research position there. He was from Wisconsin. His father had been, for a number of years, the general manager of what, at that time, was the world's largest canning factory, in Columbus, Wisconsin. And, my dad went to the University of Wisconsin, both undergraduate, graduate, and Ph.D. I think he was the youngest person to ever get his Ph.D. in biochemistry from University of Wisconsin at that time. I think he got his Ph.D. at the age of twenty-two or twenty-three.

Hicke: That's impressive.

Stare: My mother was born in Winfield, Louisiana, which is a small town in central Louisiana. Her father, when my parents got married, was governor of Louisiana, Governor Allen, who was Huey Long's successor, some might say his hand-picked successor. But, my parents met when my mother was a summer school student at the University of Wisconsin, living at a fraternity house that my father was a member of, and he had a summer job that summer,

¹This symbol (##) indicates that a tape or a segment of a tape has begun or ended. A guide to the tapes follows the transcript.

running the fraternity house as a dormitory for summer female students, summer co-eds at University of Wisconsin. That was sometime in the mid-thirties.

They got married in about '36, and they lived in Europe for three years. They came back and were living in Madison when I was born. I lived in Madison for approximately three weeks, and as a baby, moved to Chicago, Illinois, where my dad got his M.D. degree. Then, he went to Washington and Lee University, in St. Louis, for a year of internship, and then got offered a job by Harvard University School of Public Health to found and start the Department of Nutrition. So, he and my mom and my brother, who is a year older than myself, and myself, moved to Boston in 1941, December of '41, Pearl Harbor month. And, that's why I was raised a Bostonian.

Hicke: Your father has a very famous name in his field.

Stare: He is well known in the field of nutrition. It's probably safe to say that twenty-five years ago he was probably this country's foremost recognized authority on nutrition. He still is alive, at eighty-five, and still does some minor writing and work.

Hicke: How does he feel about wine and nutrition?

Stare: We've had lots of talks about this. His whole feeling about food and nutrition is anything is okay as long as it's in moderation. My father is not a wine drinker; I think he's more of a gin-and-tonic drinker. He was brought up during Prohibition. And I think people who were brought up during Prohibition were influenced more by bootleggers of gin and whisky, and he enjoys a couple of gin-and-tonics a day during the summer, and during the winter it's probably scotch and water, it's more of a wintertime thing.

I think the only wine he ever drinks is what I give him, usually two cases of wine at Christmas, and it's always nice to go visit him because he always has a nice selection of older Dry Creek wines [laughter]. He doesn't drink very much wine. Someone did send me, about a year ago, a little blurb from *Wines and Vines*, saying that back in the late fifties, my dad gave a talk at some medical meeting, I think it was Cleveland, where he was talking about the fact that small amounts of wine and alcoholic beverages may make you live longer and certainly contribute to your digestive system. But, as far as wine, per se, I think he's kind of indifferent toward it.

Hicke: I think the Harvard School of Public Health has done an impressive job of educating the public.

Stare: Yes, Dad retired when he was sixty-five, which was probably about twenty years ago, since he's eighty-five now, and he stayed on for two and a half more years because they couldn't find a replacement. The current chairman of the Department of Nutrition, Doctor Willits, is one of the fellows who has done a lot towards this whole wine-in-moderation movement. Professor Kurt Elison, Doctor Elison, from Boston University, who was the guy on "60 minutes," the CBS "60 minutes" program, Kurt was a student of my father at one time, and they're good friends.

Hicke: What was your mother's name?

Stare: Her name was Joyce Allen Stare. I like to jokingly say, my grandfather was one of the leading pioneers in the food preservation and canning industry in this country--

Hicke: Oh, was he!

Stare: Yes. And my father was professor of nutrition, and I've just carried the whole family food theme one more step to a more enjoyment of good food and fine wine [chuckles].

Hicke: Culminates with Dry Creek wines, yes, that's super. Do you have brothers and sisters?

Stare: I have a brother and a sister. My brother is Fredrick; he lives in Chicago, he's retired. He was a psychology professor for a number of years, and then managed some personal investments, had an interest in a French restaurant for a while, and is basically retired. Fred's a year and a half older than I am. My sister is Mary Sue. She's about fourteen years younger than I am, and she lives in Durham, Connecticut, with her husband, who's a doctor. They have five kids, ranging from a sophomore at Harvard down to a four year old.

Growing Up on a Farm Near Boston

Hicke: So, you grew up in Boston?

Stare: Yes.

Hicke: What do you remember about that?

Stare: We moved to Boston, as I said, in 1941, and about the first thing that I can really recall, I recall the day that my dad came back from the Second World War. When he got back, the next day we went

out and bought a dog. We nicknamed this dog Douglas after General Douglas MacArthur. Douglas was a wonderful dog. He lived with us for probably fifteen years, and we bred him; he was a registered Black Lab[rador]. For a number of years, we bred black labradors and probably had black labs for twenty-five years, until all the kids left home, and we didn't want to be involved with dogs anymore. But that was one of my first memories.

We moved to my dad's present house in, I think, the fall of 1948, when I was nine years old. My dad was raised in the small town of Columbus, Wisconsin, a city of probably 2,500, and always wanted to live out in the country. The first two houses he lived in had been in--very definitely--a suburban area of the town of Newton, which is a suburb west of Boston. I think he had always wanted to live on a farm. So, in 1948, he bought a forty-acre, run-down farm, fourteen miles west of Boston, in the town of Wellesley. We moved there in August of '48, and as I say, he still lives in the same house, although you wouldn't recognize the house now because it's been renovated so many times. But when we moved there, it was strictly a little farmhouse. I can recall there used to be tin can lids nailed on the baseboards to cover up holes where mice and rats had chewed. It was an old farmhouse, built in the 1840s. And, as I say, it's been renovated many times, and modernized, it doesn't bear much resemblance to what it was back when we moved there.

Hicke: I think that it's a great thing to save the original building if you can.

Stare: Yes. I think they actually moved there when I had gone away to summer camp. I came back from summer camp and saw the farm for the first time. It was a tiny house. My brother and I shared one small bedroom, my mother and dad shared a second bedroom, the third bedroom upstairs was lived in by my uncle. My uncle, my mother's youngest brother, lived with us when he got out of the army. He came to live with us when he was a student at Boston University. He lived with us for a couple of years in this little house. They started in 1950 to add an addition, and in about '56 to add another addition to the house. The house bears no resemblance to the way it was.

One of the other earlier remembrances of living on the farm: one other time I had gone off to summer camp; I was shipped off to summer camp for about six or seven years every summer, loved it. One day, before I had gone off to camp, we had planted a garden, and one of the things I had wanted to grow was watermelon. About two weeks before coming home in the latter part of August, I got a letter from my dad saying, "We had one large watermelon that was growing very nicely in the garden," and nothing else--the other

watermelons hadn't grown. They picked me up at North Station, on the train, and we went home, and I ran up to the garden, and there was a large watermelon there, sitting amongst a field of very puny watermelons.

Hicke: Was it attached to the vine? [laughter]

Stare: No, it was not attached. I later realized he had bought that at the supermarket that morning [laughter]! I think it still had grease pencil, "six cents a pound," or something. But, I got a kick out of that, and still enjoy it very much; it's fun remembering.

Hicke: Oh, that was a great story. Did you grow any grapes?

Stare: As a matter a fact, when they bought the farm, there were two rows of basically Concord--*Vitis labrusca*, hybrid grapes, Concord variety, two rows, probably each about a hundred yards long, from which my mother made, for a number of years, grape jelly, and we used to always have fresh-picked grapes, and they're still there.

Hicke: I guess that's the grape that would do well in a climate like that.

Stare: Well, Concord is the variety that grows commercially in the Northeast, and was, for many years, the mainstay of the New York wine industry. It's a wonderful eating grape, but it makes terrible wine; it's adapted to the snow and the cold winters that you have back East.

Education

Hicke: What about your school?

Stare: Okay, I went to the Anger Elementary School in Waban, Mass., for kindergarten, and first, and second, and for about a month of the third grade. Then I had an operation--I used to have big, Dumbo-like ears, they stuck out a mile, and I felt very self-conscious about it, and I had a operation on my ears to get them pinned back so they didn't stick out and wave at you. That was in the fall of my third-grade year at school.

I came back to school and did not adjust very well, and sometime during the fall of my third-grade year, my folks took me out of Anger, and I was enrolled in a school called the Fessenden School, which was a private day school in Newton, five miles from where we lived. Actually I repeated; they put me back a year. I

repeated my second-grade year, and then third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade at Fessenden, and thoroughly enjoyed it. Then, for my high-school years, I was sent away to Phillips Academy, Andover, Mass., and again, thoroughly enjoyed it, although a lot of people say that some of my idiosyncracies and weirdness is caused by the fact that I went to an all-boys boarding school.

Hicke: [chuckles] Well, it makes for a good excuse.

Stare: Yes, well, Andover, as you know, is one of the country's leading prep schools, where former President [George] Bush was a student, and Errol Flynn was a student there, and lots of famous people went there. I was there for four years, and again, thoroughly enjoyed it. After Andover, I enrolled in three undergraduate colleges: Princeton, R.P.I. [Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute] and M.I.T. [Massachusetts Institute of Technology]. Got turned down at Princeton, and that, probably, had been going to be my first choice; got accepted at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, in Troy, New York, and M.I.T. I ended up going to M.I.T.

My four years at M.I.T. were spent living in the DU [Delta Upsilon] fraternity house. I was a civil engineering student at M.I.T.--not a particularly distinguished scholar, I had about a B minus or a C plus average, but I enjoyed it. M.I.T. is a school where you work hard. But I thoroughly enjoyed the four years at M.I.T. I think if I had realized I was going to be in the wine business, I wouldn't have gone to M.I.T.; I would have gone to [University of California at] Davis, or someplace different.

Hicke: Let's back up a minute and find out how you got interested in civil engineering.

Stare: Okay. My lifelong love has always been railroads. I think--my dad says I got this ingrained when I was two weeks old--we moved from Madison [Wisconsin] to Chicago, and there used to be a train called the Hiawatha, which would run from Minneapolis/St. Paul to Chicago, and stopped in the town where my grandparents lived, Columbus. At one time, it was one of America's fast trains, and it would only stop for thirty seconds in Columbus. The story is told that my mother and dad got on, and then my grandfather started to hand me up in a basket, and the train started to leave. He threw me up onto the platform, and I bumped my head on a railing, and that's how I kind of got ingrained with railroads as a hobby [chortles]. And, I've been a life long railroad buff, all my life.

So, anyway, I don't know how I got into railroads, but I've been a train buff all my life. About when I was in junior high, my real goal was to go to work for a railroad. Back in the fifties and sixties, the railroads were in a bad position; they were down-

sizing, they were losing passengers, they were down-sizing from the World War II, and they were in pretty bad shape. My initial ambition in life was to save the railroads.

So, I went to M.I.T. as a civil engineering student. Civil engineering is one of the traditional branches of engineering that deals with railroads, construction of right of ways, bridges and that kind of thing. That's why I majored in civil engineering. It actually took me until about halfway through my junior year to realize I hated engineering.

My first summer job at M.I.T. was working for a construction company as an assistant surveyor, laying out the Callahan Tunnel, which is the second tunnel that was built across Boston harbor, connecting the airport to downtown Boston. The first [was] built back in the thirties, a two-lane tunnel. They built the Callahan Tunnel in the late fifties, and I worked on that. If you ever go to that tunnel, there are a couple of curves in it, and I like to jokingly say, the reason the curves are there is that we did a sloppy job of surveying, and they had to put the curves in to correct our mistakes. That's not true, of course.

But, I enjoyed that job, and then my next summer, the summer between my sophomore and junior year, I spent, like a lot of kids do, college kids, in Europe, with a backpack and a Eurorail pass kind of bumming around for two months.

And then the summer between my junior and senior year, I actually worked for the first time in California. I was able to get a job with the Matson Steamship Company, essentially as a mechanical engineer draftsman working on some of the preliminary designs of their whole container program. Containers and putting trailer trucks on flat cars were just coming on-line back in the late fifties and early sixties, and I thought it was a great future. As it turned out, half the trucks in the country now go by train in some form. I spent the summer of '61 as a design engineer for Matson, living in San Francisco. That's the first time I ever visited the California wine country. After that job, I realized I hated engineering.

So, my senior year at M.I.T., where I should have been taking advanced courses in soil mechanics and strength of materials, and that kind of thing, I took a marketing course, I took an economics course, I actually took a course in naval architecture, which was operations research, things out of the civil engineering field. So, I graduated in '62 with a Bachelor's of Science degree in civil engineering. I really did not quite know enough to be a licensed, professional civil engineer with what I knew.

Hicke: You were not interested in doing that anyway.

Stare: No, I was not. I also realized in my senior year at M.I.T. that I wanted to go right on to graduate school and get an M.B.A. So, again, I applied to maybe four or five schools, I can't recall. I think the University of Wisconsin, Michigan State, Northwestern, and I don't know where else. But I ended up going to Northwestern, which, at that time, ranked itself as one of the top ten business schools in the country. I suppose if you say, "one of the ten," that means you're number ten; if you say, "We are in the top five," we are number five [chuckle]. I got married after graduating from M.I.T., and moved to Chicago, and spent two years doing my M.B.A. at Northwestern University in Chicago.

II EARLY WORK EXPERIENCES

Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, 1964

Stare: I graduated in June of '64 from Northwestern, and then ended up working for the Baltimore-Ohio Railroad in Baltimore, Maryland. Again, I mentioned this earlier, I wanted to save the railroads, and I got a job with B&O Railroad, which was a wonderful place to work back in the early sixties, or mid-sixties. My summer job after M.I.T. and at Northwestern, I worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad as an industrial engineering assistant. The first summer I lived in Ohio, and the second summer I lived in Chicago.

In my job at the B&O, which began after graduation in '64, I was an assistant industrial engineer. What made the B&O kind of a fun place to work is, it was a railroad that had gone badly downhill in the late fifties and early sixties, and was flirting with bankruptcy in about '61 or '62. At that time, a controlling interest was bought by the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad, and they brought in a new president, a fellow by the name of Jarvis Langdon, who was a real forward-thinking guy for the railroad industry back then. He brought in a staff of bright, young associates, and my boss Bill Dickson--W.J. Dickson--developed an industrial engineering team on the B&O railroad, and I became one of his lieutenants, one of his people. I spent about two years doing that--loved it, loved the company, loved working, you know, trying to make it more efficient. I spent about two years as an industrial engineer for the B&O.

Interest in Wine: Tasting, and Planting Grapes

Hicke: Before we move on, let me ask: when did you start drinking wine?

Stare: Probably when I was a graduate student at Northwestern. I vaguely recall my first wife and I would occasionally buy a bottle of wine, but I really became interested in wine more as a hobby when I lived in Baltimore, and worked for the B&O.

Hicke: You moved from Chicago--

Stare: I moved from Chicago to Baltimore, yes. I don't know what actually got me drinking wine, but we lived--our initial house in Baltimore was right across the street from a very good wine shop, a gourmet market with a great wine shop. I'd go in there, and buy an interesting wine, and take it home, and I actually started collecting labels. I'd keep a little notebook and take the labels off the bottles and paste them in the notebook and then write some comments on them.

Hicke: Would these have been French wines?

Stare: Well, yes, some French wines. One of the ones I particularly enjoyed at that time was Almaden Mountain Grenache Rosé. I'm not even sure if it's made anymore. I don't think Almaden is in business anymore, but it's a wine I thoroughly enjoyed, and yet, it's a wine, if someone offered it to me today, I'd probably stick up my nose and scoff at it. But, I still have that book around the house somewhere, and it's kind of fun to see a half bottle of Chateau Lynch-Bages, which I might have paid two-fifty for back in the early sixties, a half bottle of that wine today is probably twenty bucks a bottle for the current vintage.

But, another kind of early influence on my life was a man by the name of Phillip Wagner. Phillip Wagner used to be the editor of the *Baltimore Sun* newspaper, but more importantly, for him and myself, he was the owner, winemaker, viticulturist of a small winery called Boordy Vineyards. Boordy used to be located in suburban Baltimore, and I would occasionally go over to his house and taste the wine and taste things out of barrels. I was just kind of fascinated with the whole idea, and actually decided to plant, in my backyard, forty grapevines. I think I bought forty grapevines, four different French-American hybrids, ten vines each, and I put them in my back yard.

Hicke: Do you happen to recall what they were?

Stare: No, I don't. One was a Rivat, I think 244, I think one was a SV13053, and there was a 5276, and the fourth variety, I forget. At that time French-American hybrids were called by their French name or they had their French name, plus a number added; 5276 was a well-known one. Since then, they've been given varietal names. I

farmed these vineyards for two years, I also made home wine in my basement for two years. As a matter of fact--[tape interruption].

[points to photograph] That is me, that is Kathy and Peter Harrington. Kathy was my first wife's roommate in college, and that's the only picture that exists of our first vintage of wine making.

Hicke: Oh, you've got a barrel stand--

Stare: It's a barrel with an end knocked off, a hand crank crusher, and we are dumping in a load of some red grape. I'm cranking the thing, and Kathy is laughing, and Peter is laughing.

Hicke: Looks like it was great fun! [chuckles] You must have bought the grapes.

Stare: Yes. We bought the grapes. There were, at that time, probably a half a dozen commercial grape growers, growing French-American hybrids for Boordy Vineyards, and I bought a hundred pounds of each of them, or something, and made for two years what turned to be red wine vinegar. It was horrible stuff; it tasted terrible. I think the problem was I didn't have the right equipment, and I think to make good home wine, you've got to spend a few hundred bucks and make sure you have some decent equipment and know how to do a couple of elementary lab tests, and I had none of that.

Hicke: You had fun though.

Stare: A lot of fun, yes. And then, I began to lose interest in my job. I wanted to get into the marketing department, and I was promoted into the marketing department, and my new boss was a fellow, Earl Swanson, who, maybe I shouldn't say this--I didn't think very much of him, and I don't think he thought very much of me.

Living and Working in Germany

Stare: In the marketing department I began to become bored with my job and was kind of looking around for something to do, and one of the things I had always wanted to do, something that all parents should make their kids do, is spend a year abroad--take advantage of the high school junior year abroad program. I never did, and I had always wanted to live overseas. My first wife's grandfather was German-Swiss.

Hicke: Can you tell me her name?

Stare: Her name was Gail, her maiden name was Hugenberger.

Hicke: And her father was German-Swiss?

Stare: Her grandfather was German-Swiss. Her dad is a professor at Harvard too, of orthopedic surgery. When we were both living in Baltimore we kind of had this goal to ultimately live overseas, or at least, travel overseas for a while, and we took two years of night school German at Johns Hopkins [University].

Hicke: In preparation?

Stare: In preparation. And then my father, for a while, for a number of years, was the director of the Continental Can Company, and through my dad--I remember one time asking dad, "I want to get a job overseas for a couple years, how do I go about it?" And, he said, "Write this guy, he's the director of Continental Can, European operation." I wrote him, and this fellow passed my letter on to one of his German associates. To make a long story short, I ultimately was offered a job as a marketing research analyst for a German steel firm that was at that time the world's largest tin plate rolling mill.

Hicke: What company is it?

Stare: Rasselstein. They offered me a job as assistant marketing analyst, and I jumped at the chance, and left my job with the railroad, and moved to Germany for two years, with my family. We lived in the town of Neuwied.

Neuwied is a Rhine River town about an hour's drive south of Cologne, Germany. The large component of the town was this tin plate rolling mill. I worked for two years as a marketing research analyst, and thoroughly enjoyed it, and at one time spoke fluent German. Again, living in Germany kind of influenced my decision to get into the wine business. My boss was a German fellow, Herr Müller, and he was an avid wine aficionado and was always talking about good wine. We'd occasionally go on business trips together, and he'd always buy the best wines, and show them to me, and let me taste them, and I became fascinated with German wines.

Hicke: The Rhine wines, the Mosels?

Stare: The Rhines and the Mosels. Neuwied is about a ten-minute drive north of where the Rhine and the Mosel flow together, and so it's a great place to visit vineyards in Germany. We were only about a three-and-a-half-hour drive from the Champagne district of France, and probably about a five-hour drive from Burgundy.

One of my closest friends from my railroad days is a fellow, Peter Weber. Peter and his brother-in-law came over in about April or May of '68.

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Stare: Peter and his brother-in-law came over in about April and May of '68. We spent a week, Peter and his brother-in-law, my first wife and I, and my younger daughter--we spent a week with them in Burgundy and Champagne, had a wonderful time visiting vineyards and wineries, then took one vacation down to Italy, spent a couple of days in Tuscany, and visited a couple of wineries there.

Hicke: Piedmont?

Stare: No, basically in Tuscany, where we were.

Developing a Serious Interest in Wine and the Wine Industry

Stare: But, you know, it just became more and more fascinating--the whole romance of winemaking, whatever that is. My job was a two-year job, and in spring of '69, I decided not to renew my contract with the German company, and moved back to Boston. I resettled in the Boston area, and made the mistake, the fatal mistake, of taking a course in wine appreciation [chuckle].

The man who taught the course became a good friend of mine, Fred Ek. Fred is now one of the partners in our wholesale business in Massachusetts, which is one of the best markets for Dry Creek. Through Fred I developed some friends in the wine business, in the retail, in the wholesale, end of the business.

In June of 1970, I spent two weeks in France on vacation in Burgundy and Bordeaux, visiting wineries. While having lunch in the town of Pauillac near Bordeaux, with a couple of retailers from Boston, and an Irish fellow who worked for a big Bordeaux shipper, I asked the Irish man, "Do vineyards and wineries ever come up for sale?" and the guy says, "Yes, as a matter of fact they do, and right now there are two fairly well-known properties that are on the market."

Hicke: In France?

Stare: Yes, in Bordeaux. A place called Chateau Raussan Segla, and a Chateau Coutet, which is a Barsac wine. I came back from that trip and talked to a couple of friends who were in the business and

ended up writing a letter to both of the chateaus, essentially saying, I represent a group of American investors, and we're interested in buying a vineyard in Europe, and I understand that your place is for sale, and what's going on?

Hicke: Did you have a group of investors?

Stare: No. Actually, I had a couple of friends who were kind of interested, but had no investors and no money. But from both of these chateaus I got a letter back saying, We were up for sale, we've taken ourselves off the market, here's our information kit, and if you are serious, we would entertain a serious offer. In both of them, I had a lot of fun looking through the inventory of the chateau and the vineyards and the winery, and decided I didn't want to move to France.

About that same time, there was an article in the *Wall Street Journal* talking about California's grape growing and wine making, what a great future it had. As a result of that article, I called a fellow who had been a fellow classmate of mine in prep school at Andover, who was an attorney in San Francisco, a fellow by the name of Steve Adams. I called Steve up and said, "What do you know about the wine business?" and he said, "Not very much, but I've got a good friend who is very heavily involved in it." And he put me in touch with Lou Gomberg. I'm sure you've met Lou, or interviewed Lou. Unfortunately, Lou passed away a couple of years ago.

Hicke: We do have a good oral history with him.

Stare: Yes. Steve was interested in wine, and they were both lawyers, and Lou had founded some group called Lawyer Friends of Wine. Anyway, I called up Lou Gomberg. This occurred in August, September, and October of 1970, and I realized that I really wanted to get in the wine business. My wife was expecting our second child. Also, the company that I worked for, when I went to France, went bankrupt about a month after this trip. So I was essentially unemployed, and flirting with the idea of getting in the wine business. I got a job as a clerk in one of the better wine shops. I figured if I wanted to get in the wine business, it was not a bad beginning job to learn how to sell wine.

Wine and Cheese Cask

Hicke: Where was this?

Stare: I got a job in a company called the Wine and Cheese Cask.

Hicke: In San Francisco?

Stare: No, it was in Boston.

Hicke: Oh, okay, Wine and Cheese Cask.

Stare: Wine and Cheese Cask was and still is one of the half dozen leading retail wine shops in greater Boston. Boston, fortunately, is an area today which is not characterized by chain stores, because one person cannot own more than one license. So, a company like Safeway could only have--if Safeway were a wine company, they could only have one grocery store that would have a liquor license, and all the other 200 Safeways couldn't have on. So, there are a few chains with liquor licenses, but one store is owned by Mr. Smith, one store is owned by Mrs. Smith, one store is owned by Mrs. Smith's brother-in-law, and that's how you get around the law, but you're effectively not a chain.

Boston is one of the few areas of the country where there are still a lot of good independent wine shops. In California, people like Safeway and Albertson's and Beverages and More have driven the independent stores, a lot of them, out of business. But I got a job working for the Wine and Cheese Cask in Somerville as a stock boy, learning about selling wine in the retail business, and thoroughly enjoyed that.

Hicke: Good experience.

Stare: Oh, yes.

Hicke: Can you give me an example of some of the things that you learned there that were really helpful?

Stare: Oh, that the customer is usually right, even when he's wrong [Laugh]. You know, that you've got to give the customers good value, and be polite to them, and just normal good business sense.

Hicke: So, dealing with customers rather than learning so much about wine.

Stare: Yes, Yes.

Hicke: But that's necessary!

Stare: Oh, I think so, very definitely.

III DRY CREEK VINEYARD, FOUNDED 1972

Moving to California

Stare: In November of 1970, right after my second daughter was born, I took off and spent two weeks in California. I met Lou Gomberg for the first time, went to the Wine Institute, talked with their people, went up to [the University of California at] Davis for a day, and talked to the people up there, probably went to Fresno State [University], and spent a fair amount of time in Sonoma and Napa, driving up and down the roads, stopping and talking at the real estate office. I met a couple of bankers, met a fellow from Bank of America, and I think the Exchange Bank, and Wells Fargo, and essentially kind of made up in my own mind that what I really wanted to do--I was having my mid-life crisis early--was come to California and get in the wine business.

I went back home from that trip just before Thanksgiving of 1970, told my family that we were moving to California. We put our house up for sale that we had bought a few months earlier, and I made several other trips to California, in the winter and spring of '71, out here.

Studying Winemaking

Stare: One of the trips was to Davis, to take a short course in winemaking and grape growing.

Hicke: Could you say what kinds of things you learned?

Stare: Well, as a result of taking that course, I realized that winemaking is a lot more complicated and a lot more scientific than what you had learned in a three-day course. I wanted to enroll at Davis, so

I spent some time and talked with Professor [Vernon L.] Singleton, who at that time was the graduate advisor of the Viticulture School in Davis. He agreed to admit me as a special graduate student taking course work only; I wasn't a degree candidate. But I had to take a summer course in organic chemistry. The only college level course in chemistry I'd had was freshman chemistry at M.I.T., which was required for all freshman, and I took it in '58-'59, and here I was, you know '72, fifteen years later, and I had forgotten most of it.

So in the summer of '71, the last summer I lived back in Boston, I enrolled in Boston University and took a course in organic chemistry. It was the hardest course I've ever taken in my life.

Hicke: After coming from M.I.T. and Northwestern?

Stare: Yes, it was the hardest course; class met Monday through Friday, 8:30 to 12; labs, Monday through Thursday, 1:00 to 4:30.

Hicke: Good heavens!

Stare: BU [Boston University], at that time, was non-air conditioned; the East, back in the summers, as you well know, can be pretty hot and humid. It was a miserable summer. I ended up getting a "B" in the course, working very hard. After finishing that course, we finally sold our house, I packed my family, and we got in to our car, and we drove out to California. We spent two weeks on the way camping out, and we had a nice case of good Bordeaux wine to drink around the camp fires.

Hicke: Beats those Conestoga wagons.

Stare: You bet. You bet. I arrived out here sometime in August of '71, in time to start in the fall at Davis, rented a house in Davis, and I spent my first year there as a graduate student doing course work only in viticulture and enology.

Hicke: And who did you take your courses with?

Stare: Let's see. Maynard Amerine taught the sensory evaluation course, that was 125. Professor [Harold] Berg taught 126, which was wine stabilization, and Professor [A. Dinsmoor] Webb taught the basic introductory course in winemaking, 124. I think he and Professor [Cornelius] Ough co-taught that course. I also took Viticulture 116A, and 116B, which are the two basic viticultural courses, which at that time were taught by Jim--Professor Cook--and took the varietal identification course taught by Doctor Lider. I took all

the basic required winemaking courses, plus organic chemistry, plus biochemistry and bacteriology.

I had a pretty full schedule, and did well; as Jim Cook, who was one of the viticulture professors said, "How could a kid from M.I.T., who's an engineer, do well in ag[riculture] courses?" [chuckles] I was a straight "A" student, and he was amazed that a guy from Boston could do that well. But I thoroughly enjoyed the courses and found them challenging and demanding; I think that when you like something and you enjoy it, it becomes easy. It's the courses that you hate that you do poorly in, and the reason you do poorly in them is because you hate them and don't study.

Hicke: Yes, you're not interested.

Stare: The point is, you hate them. You don't study them. You go home, "I'm going to study this," you end up doing something else.

Hicke: What do you think, in general, you got out of them? Of course, it's pretty obvious that you got a lot of specific information out of them.

Stare: Well, you know, I got out of them a good, thorough understanding of winemaking. The fall of '72, when we actually made our first wines, we had nothing here, but I actually bought some equipment, and set it up over at Cuvaision [winery], and made our first wines in the fall at Cuvaision.

Cuvaision used to be owned by two fellows, Tom [Thomas H.E.] Cottrell and Tom [Thomas] Parkhill, who were partners. They had started Cuvaision, I think, in '69 or '70. I literally was standing on the wine tank, reading the book on the basic fundamentals of table wine production and doing what it was saying [chuckles]. Fortunately, Tom Cottrell knew what he was talking about. Bernard Portet, from Clos du Val, also had set up some tanks there, and Chuck [Charles] Ortman, who was winemaker at Spring Mountain at the time, had his tanks there. So, there were four wineries operating under Cuvaision's license, doing their fermenting there, and, obviously, Bernard taught me a lot, and Chuck taught me a lot. But my first year was pretty much, you know, either friends helping me, or reading of the text book.

Looking for Property in Northern Sonoma County

Hicke: We're getting a bit ahead here.

Stare: Yes. Okay.

Hicke: While you were in California, and you were looking around for a--

Stare: Right, okay, we are getting ahead. Prior to enrolling at Davis, I probably made four or five trips out here. One of them was when I enrolled in that short course in the spring. On these trips, I would spend a week or two in Sonoma and Napa, and I made one down to Monterey, I think I made one to Livermore, and one up to Mendocino, looking at property and talking with the real estate people, and the folks at Davis. In the early seventies, it appeared to me that northern Sonoma County was the place to be.

Hicke: Yes, why did you think that?

Stare: In 1971, in northern Sonoma County, you only had about half a dozen wineries. In Dry Creek you had Pedroncelli [Winery], Frei Bros., Chris Fredson. Then you had Simi Winery, you had Foppiano [Vineyards], you had Italian Swiss [Colony] up in the northern Alexander Valley, that was about it. And yet, this is an area where, prior to Prohibition, there had been dozens and dozens and dozens of wineries. It just seemed that Prohibition killed them off, then the Depression came along after Prohibition, then World War II came but nothing brought prosperity back to northern Sonoma County. Yet there was a potential here. There had at one time been dozens, if not a hundred, wineries in northern Sonoma County. The first grapes were planted back here in the 1840s. People said, you know, that prior to Prohibition, Sonoma County wines were better known nationally than Napa Valley wines. It just had a reputation and history going back a long time, and it just seemed to me that there was a lot of potential here.

Land, at least in the last thirty years, had traditionally sold for less per acre here than in Napa. I think when I came on the scene in '71 or '72, the going rate for undeveloped vineyard land--potentially good, undeveloped vineyard land--was in the two to three thousand dollars per acre range. Napa Valley, probably at that time was four to five. And when it became four to five here, it was six to eight there, and now that it's fifteen to twenty-five here, it thirty-five to fifty there. And so, the land in Sonoma County always sold at somewhat of a discount from Napa Valley prices.

Also, land was fairly readily available here. I think this area was settled possibly a little bit sooner than Napa, so you have more smaller parcels. And a lot of the first and second generation farming families that first started growing grapes here in the 1880s were interested in retiring; their sons had gone off to college and become doctors and lawyers and engineers, and there

was a fair amount of property for sale back in the late sixties and early seventies at more affordable prices than in Napa.

The area was only an hour-and-fifteen-minute drive north of San Francisco--that was before the days of the big traffic jams, however--and northern Sonoma County had the climate, had the geography, had the history, and was fairly close to the city. Sometimes I enjoy the city--the symphony, that kind of thing. This just seemed like the place to start a winery.

Hicke: Did you study or evaluate the land and the climate?

Stare: Oh yes, I spent a lot of time looking at the regions system developed at U.C. Davis, and I talked to the farm advisor, Bob Session a number of times. I remember meeting Dave Goode. Dave is one of the leading viticultural experts in northern Sonoma County, and actually, he came out four or five times, and dug holes with a back-hoe in various parts to check the soil profiles.

But it just seemed that northern Sonoma County was the place to locate. I made offers on four or five ranches. The real estate agent that I was working with, I won't mention his name, but he turned out to be--he was basically crooked. What he would do is, I would spend a half a day with him, we'd drive around Dry Creek Valley and Alexander Valley, and I'd say, "Gee, that's an interesting looking place," [and he'd say,] "Yeah, that belongs to Old Man Smith. I heard rumors he's thinking about selling out and retiring. Let me go talk to him, and let's see what we can come up with." Well, he would go to Old Farmer Smith and say, "I've got this city slicker from Boston with tons of money," you know, "I bet you I could sell your ranch at two thousand bucks more than anybody else has ever gotten."

It took me about a year to catch on to this, that that's what his technique was. But I spent a lot of time with him, and I made offers on probably about half a dozen parcels. I once had a loaded shotgun pointed at me. We had an appointment to see a ranch, and I showed up with the real estate agent and knocked on the door, and the guy came to the door, and the realtor said, "I'm George Jones, from ABC Realty, we have an appointment, I'm going to show the ranch to Mr. Stare here." The occupant disappeared and came back a minute later with a shotgun over his arm, and said, "You know, I'd kind of appreciate it if you left the property now." "No problem, sir, we'll call and come back later, no problem."

Hicke: What was that all about?

Stare: For all I know, the guy had a big marijuana patch in the backyard, or something. That never happened to me before or since.

Hicke: That would be rather startling.

Purchasing Dry Creek Vineyard Property

Stare: But, to make a long story short, as they say, I found this property. After about a year of working with this agent, I began to get tired of him and stopped using him.

One day, I was driving up Dry Creek Road, it was spring, about the latter part of February or March of '72, and there used to be a farmer named Paul Le Baron, a very well-respected, old-time grape grower. Paul was on his tractor, cultivating and disking, the first disking of the spring, and I stopped my car and watched the tractor come down to the end of the road. When he got about twenty feet from where I was standing, he stopped the tractor, got off, and came over, and started talking to me, and we chatted for about five minutes.

I introduced myself, and I said, "I'm from Boston. I'm possibly moving out here. I'm a student at Davis. I'd like to buy seventy-five to a hundred acres of property, and I want to build a winery and make a great wine from Sonoma County grapes." And he said, "You know, I've got just the place for you. Mrs. Howe is a good friend, my wife and I had dinner with her a couple of weeks ago, and she was saying, 'I'm thinking about selling my property,' Mrs. Howe's husband had passed away a couple years earlier, she was tired of living in the country." He said, "Let me get in your car. Let me go down and introduce you to her." He got in my car, we drove down, and he introduced me to Mrs. Howe, and she said, "Yes, I am thinking about selling." I gave Paul a ride back to the tractor, and came back, and we concluded the deal in five minutes. She was asking a reasonable price. I didn't get a bargain, but I wasn't robbed either; it was basically the going price, and we concluded it in about five minutes.

Hicke: How much did you pay, can I ask?

Stare: We paid \$2,700 an acre.

Hicke: And how many acres?

Stare: Bought from her: fifty-five. At the same time, I bought another twenty-two from Mr. Honig, which is where my house is.

Hicke: Oh, okay. So you bought seventy-seven acres.

Stare: We bought seventy-seven acres initially, and paid for the house site, I think, \$74,000 for twenty-two acres on a hillside lot, stretching up into the hills, with about eight of plantable land and about twelve acres of second-growth redwood trees in the back of my house, kind of a 1950s style house. It was actually built as a summer home. That's how I came to get this place.

Hicke: What was here?

Stare: What was here was a run-down prune orchard. Most of Dry Creek in the early seventies had been prunes and pears. There were probably 800 to 1,000 acres of grapes, and probably 5,000 to 6,000 acres of prunes and pears, in what is now the Dry Creek Valley appellation.

Hicke: I understand that grape growers took over the prune orchards because it was more lucrative.

Stare: During Prohibition the grapes died out, along with a number of row crops; there was corn grown here, and beans, and tomatoes for a while.

Hicke: Hops.

Stare: Hops were a fairly big commodity for a while. That's why there's the old Hop Kiln Winery, and old Hop Barn, and there's still four or five others [hop kilns]. Chateau Souverain, when it was built twenty years ago, was built in the style of the classic Sonoma County hop barn.

So anyway, hops were planted fairly heavily in the thirties, I think. I think what killed hops is that it is a very labor-intensive crop, and as people went off to war in the Second World War, there weren't people left here to farm the hops. So farmers, at that time, switched to prunes and pears; Healdsburg used to be the center of the California prune industry.

The largest single building in town is the old Sunsweet prune dehydrator; I'm not sure what's in there now. It was for a while a wine warehouse, but it's a very large, strong building at the south end of town. There were four or five other independently owned and operated prune dehydrators and co-ops, and I think there is only one left operating in town.

So this area was all prunes and pears, and now the only prune trees left are the few here and there. The same thing in Alexander Valley, the same thing in Russian River, and to a lesser extent, the Napa Valley too.

Hicke: And Santa Clara Valley, and so on. What was here on this property?

Stare: This was a fifty-acre, run-down prune orchard with an old prune dehydrator--they used to do their own drying here--and a little house where Zita Eastman lives; that was Mrs. Howe's house. If we had been sitting where we are now in the spring of '72, we would have been in a run-down prune orchard. I took possession of the property, I think it closed on April 4, 1972.

Building the Winery and Making Wine

Hicke: And what was the first thing you did?

Stare: I-originally wanted to build the winery up at my house.

Hicke: Did building the winery come before planting?

Stare: Yes. My original idea was to plant fifty acres of vineyards. That's going to give you, roughly, 200 tons of grapes, which is roughly 12,000 cases of wine. My original plan was to be producing about 10,000 cases of wine when our own vineyards came into production, and then, as they came into production, it would give us the ability to double to 20,000 cases.

In 1972, I originally wanted to build the winery up at my house. We had a use permit hearing on the field there. The board of planning [the zoning board] approved the use permit, five to zero. Then the neighbors started passing a petition and created a hell of a stink--mainly led by Jerry Lambert, who used to own Lambert Bridge Winery--that West Dry Creek Road is not the place to build a winery: too small a road, it was too narrow, too windy, you'd have major problems with sewer water disposal because of the low percolation of the ground, it was very heavy clay soils up on the hillside--just not the place to build a winery. And, of course, I'd go around and get other neighbors to sign that they were in favor of the winery. I collected 200 signatures and the opponents had collected 200, and it was obvious that the winery plans were going to be delayed for a while. That's when I began to look around for a place to build the winery to actually make wine that fall, and that's when I went over and asked my friends at Cuvaison, Could I set up four tanks? and they said, Sure.

Hicke: You bought those grapes?

Stare: Yes, I bought those grapes. I had four tanks of my own, I had my own wine press, I had a couple other pieces of equipment, and the rest of the equipment I used, I borrowed from Cuvaison. In that fall, we made dry Chenin Blanc, Fumé Blanc, which is Sauvignon

Blanc, and Chardonnay. The reason we made those three white wines is those are my favorite wines to drink in France, in Europe, rather.

Hicke: Why did you call the Sauvignon Blanc Fumé Blanc?

Stare: It sold better. I can recall having luncheon with Barney Fetzer sometime about that time and talking about Fumé Blanc versus Sauvignon Blanc, and he had told me that the reason he calls it Fumé Blanc is that it sells better. He told me the story that when he first started the Fetzer Vineyards a few years earlier, they test marketed; they bottled the same wine, but in the morning it was labeled Fumé Blanc, and if it was bottled after lunch it was labeled Sauvignon Blanc. They put the wines on a shop shelf, and the Fumé out-sold the Sauvignon Blanc, three to one.

Hicke: That's pretty impressive.

Stare: And then they did some taste-testing with their taste panel, and if you're given glass A, and told that glass A is the Sauvignon Blanc, and glass B is the Fumé Blanc, they liked Fumé Blanc three to one. If you told them to tell them apart, people couldn't tell them apart. So, the name Fumé Blanc tends to sell better than Sauvignon Blanc, and since, I guess, I'm basically a wine salesman, I wanted to sell wine, so I called it a Fumé. Most of the leading Fumé Blancs are called Fumé Blanc: Mondavi, Beringer, Chateau St. Jean, Dry Creek. I think the only exception to that, really, is probably Kenwood, and possibly Murphy Goode, I don't whether they call his a Fumé or a Sauvignon wine, but those are all well-recognized, high-quality brands, and I think Fumé does sell better than Sauvignon Blanc.

Hicke: So you chose those wines because you liked them.

Stare: Yes. That's basically why.

Hicke: And how did you find the grapes?

Stare: For the Sauvignon Blanc: Rich Thomas, who was from the Santa Rosa Junior College viticultural program, was a good friend, and he was a student at Davis when I was there, and I think I called Rich. I said, "Rich, who is a top-quality Sauvignon Blanc grower?" He said, "Joe Rochioli, best one around." I called Joe up and talked him out of ten tons of Sauvignon Blanc grapes.

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Hicke: We were just talking about Sauvignon Blanc grapes.

Stare: Yes. Like I said, I called up Rich Thomas, who runs the viticultural program here at Santa Rosa, and he suggested Joe [Joseph] Rochioli for Sauvignon Blanc, Bob [Robert] Young for Chardonnay, and for Chenin Blanc, he couldn't think of anybody. I wanted a try at Chenin Blanc. Cuvaision always made Chenin Blanc, and I talked Tom Cottrell into buying an extra ten tons of Chenin Blanc from his supplier and selling us the grapes. In actuality, our '72 Chenin Blanc is the exact same wine as theirs: it was made in the same tank as the Cuvaision Chenin Blanc was made in. They made ten tons worth of Chenin Blanc for us.

Hicke: Sounds like people are fairly cooperative around there.

Stare: They were very cooperative. I think that's changed, somewhat. But Tom Cottrell is still one of my best friends; he lives back East, and I haven't seen him in a couple of years, but Tom's a good friend. So, anyway, that's how we bought the roughly thirty tons of grapes we crushed that year.

The Chenin Blanc, as I said, was fermented and bottled at Cuvaision and trucked back here. In order to get a winery license, I had to have a barn winery permit. I had to bond the small farmhouse where Mrs. Howe had lived. The garage was our barrel storage area, we had about thirty barrels in there--Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay. We actually used the living room as the case storage area. I bragged that we had the only case storage area in California with wall-to-wall carpeting in it. That was our first winery. Then in the spring of '73 we began to build the first building here, which was the building you see when you drive up the highway, the one with the sign that says Dry Creek Winery, 1973. Even though we made our first wines in '72, that sign says '73.

[tape interruption]

Stare: That first building--we broke ground for that in about May of '73, finished it in August of '73, and that year also bought, I think, ten more fermenting tanks, another 150 barrels or something, and beginning with the fall of '73, made all the wines here. Made the same three whites, the Chenin, the Fumé, and the Chardonnay, but also added red wines--Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel, Merlot, and also made a Rosé of Cabernet, a pink rosé wine.

Hicke: Well, I have two ways to go: I want to find out about the vineyards and all those grapes, and I want to find out more about your winery and the kinds of equipment, and where you got it.

Stare: Okay, we can talk about both. The other thing that had been done on this location is when I bought the property, as I said--I think we closed in April of '72--I made sure that Mrs. Howe and her son

could continue to live in the house through the harvest of '72, and continue to farm, and keep the income from the prunes that were harvested in '72. They did that, and the prune harvest was finished here by about the end of August, and as soon as they harvested, we came in with bulldozers and bulldozed out all the trees, and ripped and fumigated the soil, and got it ready for planting. Then we made the wines over at Cuvaision, and built the first building here in 1973, which is a ninety-six-by-thirty-six-foot-square, concrete block building.

I had hired an architect-engineer, Richard Keith and Associates. Dick Keith designed a lot of wineries; he was kind of the hot winery designer back in the early to mid-seventies. I told Dick I wanted something that looked like a French winery that might have been here for a hundred years, or an early stone California winery. His initial drawing was for a very modern structure, and I said, "No, no, that's not what I had in mind." Actually, I found a book on French wine and pointed out: This is what I wanted it to look like, and that's what he came up with. Although the design has never won any architectural awards, it looks like it's a building which has been here for a hundred years, with the ivy plant around it; I think it's very attractive and much better than something that is really ultramodern.

Hicke: How much input did you have into the design, when you told him what you wanted, and then you approved the plans, and so forth?

Stare: The actual winemaking layout, since I didn't know much about that, was pretty much his design, and I'm sure I got Tom Cottrell's input into it, and other friends' input into it. We moved in here when it was completed in August of '73, and the first official act done in the new winery was to bottle our '92 Chardonnay, which was barrel-aged over in the garage at the house here.

Equipment

Hicke: Tell me about the equipment.

Stare: It was very, very antiquated bottling equipment. I think I borrowed from Cuvaision, and then we had bought a little, six-siphon, inexpensive, Italian filler. Our corking machine was an old, rebuilt, hand-corker, which you'd stand up, and you'd put the bottle in, and you'd drop a cork in the top, and oooooooh!--you'd push down.

Hicke: You'd push it down by hand!

Stare: We would do about three hundred cases a day, and it was back-breaking work, physically hard work. We had a homemade sparger, which we made out of truck air brake parts, where you put the bottles on a tube, and you push down, and you press a little lever, and you squirt nitrogen into the bottle to replace the air--

Hicke: Somebody jury-rigged that?

Stare: Yes, it was a jury-rigged thing, it was the same kind of thing that Cuvaision had used, and that was our bottling equipment. Labeling was all done by hand with a little hand labeler--you'd run one label through, you'd pick it up as it comes out, and put the bottle in a cradle, and put it on by hand--very slow, very antiquated.

When we opened for business that fall, we opened with kind of a small tasting area. We had a woman here who used to tend the area on the weekends, and when there were no customers, during the weekend or the weekday, she would have to label bottles of wine. That's the way it was for the first couple of years.

A Distinctive Label Design

Hicke: Since you mentioned labels, this would be a good time to talk about your design.

Stare: Yes. Our initial label was designed by the wife of one of our first grape growers, Rosinda Holmes, who was a well-known local artist here in Sonoma County. She lives about four doors from my house, and her husband is a printer, and he happens to have a small print shop in his garage; I think he's retired now. Rosinda was an artist, and she designed the first label that had a pen and ink drawing of the winery.

If you look above, up on the beam, you'll see there is a progression of labels of every vintage of Fumé Blanc, from '72 to the current one, which shows how the labels have progressed. It's very interesting. We had that label in '72 and '73, and then in '74, we redesigned it to eliminate the back label, and put the so-called back side, or b.s. information, on the front, and that was a description of the wine. We had that for one year, it was uglier than hell, and then we redesigned the label in '75, and went to a one-piece, wrap-around label, so that the mandatory information is on the front part, and the side would contain a little history of the winery, a story about the wine. We had the so-called wrap-around label from about '75 to about '84 or '85, in one form or

another. Then again, we had a pen-and-ink drawing of the winery, I think done by Rosinda Holmes.

Back in about '84 or '85, we hired our first full-time sales rep[resentative], and put her down in Los Angeles to help our Los Angeles distributor sell. Mary Jo got tired of hearing, "The wines taste great, but the labels are terrible; you've got to get rid of that ugly-looking building. It's a hideous label." That's when we began to realize we needed to make a change in the label. We had kind of nicknamed that label the Fort Apache label. One night, after several bottles or glasses of wine, someone said, "That looks like Fort Apache." It had a pen-and-ink drawing of the winery and a flagpole with the American flag flying from it, and grapevines kind of sprinkled around the field, around the winery, in artistic fashion. I guess to someone in a slightly inebriated state, the grapevines began to look like Indians on ponies [laughter] circling the western fort, hence, Fort Apache.

Hicke: Strong stuff!

Stare: Yes. So anyway, I hired a graphic artist, an illustrator, who came up with some designs, and he made, oh, six or seven or eight dozen different mock-ups, featuring, again, drawings of the building. There was a drawing of Lambert Bridge and Dry Creek here, a couple of drawings of Dry Creek Valley, and a couple of drawings of grapevines, but they all began to look like everybody else's labels.

I said to Steve, "You know, my hobby all my life has been sailing." I haven't mentioned it before, but I started sailing when I was kid. "I have a sailboat on San Francisco Bay; when I'm not at the winery I try and take off and go sailing on the weekends. Let's try something with a sailing theme. I know sailing has got nothing to do with wine, other than the fact that in this case, the owner of the winery is also an avid sailor."

So I gave him probably several boxes of back issues of *Yachting*, and *Cruising World*, and he took them back to his studio and played around them and made some sketches and drawings. We got together a couple of weeks later, and I said, "Hey, that's what we want; they're dramatic, they're bold." That's how the sailing theme evolved. I can recall, just before we launched the first label, that we ran a few little classified ads in the *Wine Spectator*. "What's a sailboat doing on a 'Dry Creek?'" For further information call 707-433-1000."

Hicke: Oh, that's all you put in?

Stare: Yes. We got a few inquiries. But when it came out, it was very successful. I remember getting a call from Bob Hoffman, who was the sales manager of Classic Wine Imports, our Boston wholesaler, and they were actually our largest single market. And Bob said, "Dave, the sailing label is going to account for about a 20-percent increase in the sale of your wine without any further effort on our behalf. People just love it, they pick it up, and they take the bottle home."

Hicke: That is spectacular.

Stare: So we have kept to that label since about '85. My daughter, Kim [Stare Wallace], came to work for me probably about '87 or '88. Her background: she studied fashion design and home economics at San Francisco State [University]. She worked for about three years as a frustrated dress designer and accessory designer, and production manager for a couple of ladies' apparel manufacturing companies in San Francisco, and then got fed up with a business where all they were doing was copying other stuff. She came to work for me, and she evolved our current set of labels in the last four or five years. But that's what happens when you get a frustrated dress designer who knows something about color.

Hicke: Every winery should have one. Every business should have one.

Stare: She began to develop; as we were saying at lunch, she now has her own business: Kim Wallace, consulting. She still does our marketing, but she's also doing some packaging consulting for other wineries. She's helping them redesign their label, redesign their image and logo. She's very good at that kind of thing. And that's the history of the labeling.

Marketing and Distribution

Stare: I used to do everything myself here. I not only made the wine, but I would bottle it, put it in back of the car, peddle it. For one of my initial sale trips to Southern California, Mike Richmond, who was at that time the sales manager of Freemark Abbey gave me a list of good retail accounts. I used this for my initial sales contacts. Chuck Carpy, Freemark's general partner, was also very helpful to me as he helped me with some financial plans for the bank. I spent some time with Chuck, and he showed me Freemark

Abbey's financial plans and financial statement; he was very openly sharing this information, and very, very helpful.¹

Anyway, Mike gave me a list of all the top retailers--who was all right, who doesn't pay--and I used that as my initial selling tool. I can recall being down in Southern California once, and there used to be a chain of independent retail stores called King's Cellars. It was based out of Hermosa Beach; there were eight of them. They were owned by Stan Weller and his wife.

They were one of the leading retailers of fine wine in Southern California. I remember having an 8:30 appointment with Stan. At that time we had a Gamay Beaujolais, a dry Chenin Blanc, a Fumé Blanc, and a Chardonnay for sale: three whites and a red. I showed them all to Stan, and he said, "Those are the ugliest labels in the world. I couldn't possibly sell those wines in my store. Don't waste my time."

Hicke: Which labels were these?

Stare: They were the initial ones, designed by Rosinda Holmes. I replied, "Well, sir, the wines are very good. Let me leave them here for you to taste and I will call you next week." Then I made a hasty retreat, shaken; what do you do when a guy tells you your labels look like hell?

That evening I had been asked to speak to Nate Chroman's class. Nate used to be the wine writer for the *L.A. Times*. He taught a class in wine appreciation in Beverly Hills, and I was to be a guest lecturer. After the class, about ten o'clock at night I had not had supper yet, and I asked him, "Where is a place to get a sandwich, or something to eat here?" He said there was a very famous, all-night, Jewish delicatessen a half mile away. I went down there and ordered, and then went to the men's room, and by God, in the men's room was Stan Weller that I had tried to show the wines to that morning and who had told me what lousy labels I had.

We were standing at adjoining urinals, "Hey," you know, "those wines actually tasted pretty damn good. Would you please send me ten cases of each." [laughter]. I was so pleased. This guy became a good friend. He passed away, unfortunately, a few years ago. But that was one of my initial sales successes in southern California.

¹See Charles A. Carpy, "Viticulture and Enology at Freemark Abbey," an oral history conducted in 1993 by Carole Hicke, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1994.

Another one was Darrel Corti. Corti Brothers was a very famous wine shop and gourmet grocery store in Sacramento. And he was, for a long time, the only game in town for fine wine in Sacramento. I got to know Darrel when I was student at Davis. I helped organize a student wine-tasting society, and Darrel came over one night to address the group; Darrel is an expert in sherries and ports. He came over and did a lecture on sherries and ports and tasted some with us. When I introduced Darrel, I said, "This is Darrel Corti, one of the owners of Corti Brothers grocery store, a marvelous gourmet grocery store in Sacramento, which happens to have a very fine wine department, which Darrel has developed." He was almost upset that I called it a "grocery store," rather than wine shop, but it's primarily a grocery store, or was at that time.

Anyway, he never bought our wine, and I can recall going over to see him one day to show him our first releases. He said, "Dave, I can't expect my customers to pay three and a quarter for Chenin Blanc. Chenin Blanc is a two-dollar-and-fifty-cent bottle of wine; why are they going to pay you three and a quarter for it?" I said, "Darrel, I noticed you are selling frankfurters out there for \$1.49 a pound. Those are only supposed to be worth \$.79 a pound. Wake up! There's inflation out there. You want to sell your hot dogs at a profit; I want to sell my wine at a profit!"

He still didn't buy that evening. Darrel used to teach some wine appreciation classes down at Lake Arrowhead with the U.C. Extension service. One day he called me and said, "Dave, I want to get a case of your Fumé Blanc,"--I forget the vintage. I said, "Great, great! How do you want to get it?" And he said, "Well, I'll be over in the Napa Valley. Leave it off at such-and-such a winery and I'll pick it up." What I should have said--see, he still wouldn't carry the wine. I should have said, "Darrel, why don't you go over to Joe's Liquors? They're the only retail outlet in Sacramento who buys the wine." [Chuckles] But I didn't. That was an example of some of the funny things about first marketing wine.

Oh, something else I wanted to mention: I mentioned earlier that our dry Chenin Blanc was the exact same tank, the exact same blend as Cuvaision's; it was bottled the same day, it was bottled in the morning and we bottled Cuvaision in the afternoon. At that time there was a wine writer, Robert Finnegan--this is a story I've never publicly told. Anyway, Robert Finnegan, who published *Finnegan's Private Guide to Wine*. He was the leading wine writer on the West Coast at the time. He was the Robert Parker of the West Coast, he was well known in the wine country. In about May of '72, he came out with some reviews about Chenin Blancs, with raves about ours as being the best ones in the '72 vintage, a marvelous

wine, rich, complex, blah, blah, blah, just wonderful balance. I don't believe the Cuvaison was reviewed by him at that time.

Well, we sold out of that wine pretty quickly after that review, and then we released the Fumé in May of '72. In the July or August issue, he came out with a glowing report: "The '72 Fumé Blanc, Dry Creek, best wine in California." Those two incidents put us on the wine map from an early start. I would much rather, as a new vintner, have a couple of roaring reviews than a couple of terrible reviews. I used to teach Basic Wine Marketing at Santa Rosa J.C. [Junior College]. I used to always tell my students: The most important thing, if you're a new winery, is make sure your first wine is dynamite and get some very good press on it. We were lucky, in both cases, to have great reviews on the wine. It got us off and running.

Hicke: He didn't even mind the label, I guess.

Stare: He didn't mind the label, no.

Planting the Vines; Vineyard Management

Hicke: Nobody did after they tasted the wine! Well, do you have any more stories, or shall we go back, because I still don't know about your planting.

Stare: Okay, yes. I mentioned that we tore up the trees in the fall of '72 and fumigated all the property around here. In 1973, I planted what we now call DCV number 3, which is across the creek; it's a twenty-acre block across the creek. That was planted ten acres to Sauvignon Blanc and ten acres to Chenin Blanc. The varieties, I chose; those were the ones I wanted to plant. I had Bob Session, who was the Sonoma County Farm Advisor, come out, right after I bought my property, and we inspected the soil and we had dug some holes. I said, "Bob, what should I plant here?" He said, "Well, I would put in Cabernet, Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, White Riesling, and Gewürtztraminer." Those were the hot, recommended wines.

I said, "What about Sauvignon Blanc?" "Nobody plants that now. You don't want to put Sauvignon Blanc in, it's a bad wine." "What about Chenin Blanc?" "Oh, nobody's planting Chenin Blanc, it's a bad wine." So, I put in Chenin Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, and Cabernet. I took two of his suggestions, and the other two I didn't take.

My basic plan was to make a California version of what I liked to drink from France: Chenin Blanc, Fumé Blancs (both from the Loire Valley), Chardonnay (Burgundy) and Cabernet/Merlot wines (Bordeaux). As it turned out, we had a hit with Sauvignon Blanc, as it has been our most successful variety. The initial plants of DCV3 was ten acres Sauvignon Blanc and ten acres Chenin Blanc.

By about 1980, it was clear that Chenin Blanc couldn't be grown profitably on Sonoma County property, because the land was worth too much to afford to plant a grape that sold for four hundred bucks a ton. Fortunately, for people who wanted to make Chenin Blanc wine, the Delta area of Clarksburg, in Yolo County, over near Sacramento, has a wonderful microclimate and grows great Chenin Blanc, and farmers there can sell it for \$300 to \$350 a ton and make money and stay in business, and I can still make profitable Chenin Blanc, so--that's where all of our Chenin Blanc has come from, and where the vast majority, most of the better Chenin Blanc, grown in California, now comes from.

The other vineyard we planted, in about the fall of '73, is what we now call DCV 4, which is a thirteen-acre block; it's a seventeen-acre parcel of land, and it has thirteen acres of Chardonnay, about a mile south of here on West Dry Creek Road--2990 is the legal address for the property. That was planted with Chardonnay in '73. Both of those vineyards came under production in '75. We began to use that fruit. The winery parcel here is known as DCV 2 now, and that was originally planted with seven acres of Cabernet and two acres of Merlot. That was planted in '74, started producing in '76, and by '78 or '79 it was very clear that the Cabernet that was produced on the property was superb Cabernet. Unfortunately, Cabernet was in great supply, and fairly low priced in '79, '80.

Chardonnay was the hot variety, so I budded over five and a half acres in front of the winery to Chardonnay from Cabernet. This proved to be a mistake as the quality is only okay. It grew great Cabernet, but now we had five and a half acres of mediocre Chardonnay.

Hicke: What did you do about spacing and trellising?

Stare: The spacing was a standard Davis eight-by-twelve, and the trellising was a standard California, two or three wire, vertical trellising, no exotic trellising. You know, everybody put in eight-by-twelve spacing, DCV 3 and 4 have solid set, permanent frost protection, and with overhead sprinklers. There's not enough water on this site for that, so here we have drip irrigation.

Hicke: Tell me about your vineyard manager.

Stare: Our vineyard manager, for the first year, was a fellow, Mike Ruge. Mike had been a student at Davis when I was there, kind of a part-time student. He worked for me for probably a year and a half. He eventually disappeared, and in about '75 the highly regarded Duff Bevill became our vineyard manager.

Duff has since gone on; he is still our vineyard manager, but he has a pretty successful vineyard management company called Bevill Vineyard Management. He operates out of our facility; his office is down in our barn. He probably farms about four hundred acres of grapes now, of which Dry Creek is about a hundred and twenty-five. He's on our payroll, but he only works part time for us. Duff is very conscientious and very quality oriented, and as I say, he probably farms about four hundred acres, and we are probably a third of his total business. I think we are by far his largest single customer, and he's been with us since '75 or '76.

Pioneering in Dry Creek Valley

Hicke: You know, what we haven't gotten on the record yet is that there were no other wineries in Dry Creek before yours.

Stare: Yes. When I came on scene in '72, there were three operating wineries: J. Pedroncelli up the street on Canyon Road. They were bought by the Pedroncelli family, I think, in 1927. There was Frei Brothers, which was actually right across the street; you can't really see it from this angle, but you can see when you go out in the valley. Frei Brothers is now the Gallo crushing facility here. They crush in one day of a week what it takes us a year for us to do. And the third one at that time was Chris Fredson, which, as you drive back into town tonight, is that dull, red, rusty, old, tin building off to the right, about a mile south of here--very picturesque, old, rusty, red, tin barn.

I think that was originally built as the Healdsburg Wine Company, back about the turn of the century, and the Fredson family had a winery over in Geyserville, but when they built the 101 freeway up here, back in the mid-sixties, they condemned their winery; the winery was unfortunate enough to be in the path of the freeway, so it was torn down, and they moved here, and they bought the old Healdsburg Wine Company. That operated as a winery until about five years ago, until it closed down. It's a very antiquated, old-fashioned winery. I think virtually all of their production was sold to Charles Krug over in the Napa Valley.

Hicke: But all of these were here long ago.

Stare: Yes. They were all here. I think I mentioned once that I looked briefly at Fredson Winery to buy it, to make it into a red wine barrel storage facility, but there were some problems with the disposal of industrial water. It was using an illegal cesspool; there was a big open pit in back, which you can dump water into, and it's grandfathered in as being legal, but if it ever has some major problems, they would condemn it, and there's no place on that property to build. I hired a civil engineer to look at it, and he said, "Dave, I wouldn't touch this place with a ten-foot pole, unless you can buy a couple of acres from your neighbors and put an actual, legal leach field in," which would require approaching the neighbors and asking them to sell me a couple of acres, or lease me land, so I walked away from the deal. It started being used about a year ago. I have no idea what the new people are going to do with it if their waste water system should fail.

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Hicke: Anyway, you built the first new winery in Dry Creek; that's what I really want to make clear.

Stare: This is the first new winery built here, really since Prohibition. We started in 1972. Since then you have Preston [Vineyards] built in '74 or five, Rafanelli [Winery], who came along sometime in the late seventies, Mill Creek [Vineyards], Lytton Springs [Winery], Mazzocco [Vineyards], Quivara [Vineyards], Domaine Schlumberger, Chateau Diana, but it's not really a winery, Ferrari-Carano, whose showplace is up in the northern end of the valley. I think there are twenty or twenty-one operating wineries today.

Hicke: Yes, the signpost pointing to the wineries is covered from top to bottom.

Stare: I think prior to Prohibition there were about thirty. I always say, when I give a talk, that prior to Prohibition, there were thirty wineries in Dry Creek. I'm not sure if that's an exact number, but there were a lot of wineries here then, and in '72, there were only three. We were the fourth, and now there are about twenty. Again, all the prune trees have been torn up, and there are only grapes here.

Hicke: No prunes left?

Stare: No prunes left. There may be one or two, but virtually none left.

Hicke: Well, you started something.

Stare: Yes. And, you know, we went against what the farm advisor said and planted Sauvignon Blanc; the one white variety that Dry Creek was always known for, head and shoulders above everything else, was Sauvignon Blanc. I think most wineries would probably tell you that Dry Creek appellation Sauvignon Blanc--that and Zinfandel, for red wine--are probably the two best varieties produced here.

Sauvignon Blanc: The Dry Creek Flagship Wine

Hicke: What are your goals for your Sauvignon Blanc?

Stare: We want to make a Sauvignon Blanc that tastes like a Sauvignon Blanc. A lot of Sauvignon producers try to tame that grassy, wild character, and try to over-oak it and make it more like a Chardonnay than a Sauvignon Blanc. We want our Sauvignon Blanc to definitely taste like Sauvignon Blanc. Yet at the same time, we don't want to be overpoweringly aggressive, or over-aggressive; I think over-aggressive Sauvignon Blancs are not terribly appealing. There is kind of a fine edge there between making it taste like a Sauvignon Blanc, having a hint of that grassy, herbaceous, quality, and being overly soft. We wanted to have definite hints of that, without being overly aggressive.

Hicke: I understand you are doing some experimenting. Can you tell me about that?

Stare: We used to do no barrel fermentations here. I would say beginning in the late eighties, we began playing around with barrel fermentation, and now our regular production, our regular bottling of Sauvignon Blanc typically is zero to 10 percent barrel fermented with the remainder being stainless steel fermented. Our reserve is typically 100 percent barrel fermented. And again, our typical, regular Sauvignon Blanc was stainless-steel-tank-fermented and some barrel aging, but not a lot; we don't want the wine to have a woody characteristic. Our reserve Fumé Blanc is barrel aged, barrel fermented, and very definitely woody; some would say it's over-oaked, I might even say that. I've never been a fan of over-oaked wine. On the other hand, I think when someone is buying a reserve-style Sauvignon Blanc, they want a lot of oak. But as long as people are willing to buy it, I'm willing to make it.

Hicke: That makes sense. I believe there is a special wine, maybe experimental, offered to your wine club.

Stare: Oh, that's the Wollcott Chardonnay, I think.

Hicke: Well, I know that Fumé Blanc is your most well-known wine.

Stare: It's kind of a hallmark or benchmark wine. This year, just due to the fact that Sauvignon Blanc grapes were scarce, we actually made more Chardonnay for the first time, in '95, than Sauvignon Blanc. We've got, oh, about 450 tons of Chardonnay, and about 370 tons of Sauvignon Blanc because of the lack of grapes this year.

Winemakers at Dry Creek

Hicke: Well, let's go back and talk about your winemaking and about your first winemaker.

Stare: Okay. Our first winemaker was myself. I made the wines, as I told you earlier, by reading the textbook and trying to follow what it said, with the help of Bernard Portet, Chuck Ortman, and Tom Cottrell. In '73, I was the winemaker, but I was assisted by a friend of mine, Tom Dehlenger. Tom, I think, had worked somewhere for a year or two as an apprentice. And he worked here for a year as my assistant, and he had a lot of input. He went on and started Dehlenger Winery, down in Forestville. In '74, I had a friend, Fred Brander, who worked here. Fred had worked for a couple of years at some other winery. Fred is an Argentinean-American. He was born in Argentina but was raised in this country. Fred, since then, has gone on to build Brander Winery down near Santa Barbara, in Los Olivos.

Hicke: You trained and promoted a lot of other winemakers.

Stare: Yes. In '75, I hired John Jaffrey as my assistant, and John, in a sense, took over the winemaking operation in the mid- to late seventies. I would say by about '78 or '79, he was the winemaker, and I became the winemaster. I think when you're on the road, giving a winemaker dinner or lecturing to a sales force, you're better off to be the winemaker or winemaster rather than the president of the company. So John made the wines, pretty much exclusively, from about '77 on. In '81, I hired a young kid out of Davis, Larry Levin, as John's assistant. In the spring of 1982, John Jaffrey left us and went to work for Zellerbach, and that opened up the winemaking position to Larry, who is our winemaker now and has been our winemaker since '82. He just finished his fifteenth harvest.

Hicke: Tell me about his goals and working with him; obviously you've been successful.

Stare: Yes. One of the things I learned fairly soon in dealing with Larry is--and I used to do this with John--to always kind of hover over him and make sure he does things my way. It was always very frustrating to John, and I tried to do the same thing with Larry, but sometime, I don't know, in '82, '83, or '84 Larry and I had a big fight, and he said, "Dave, if you don't leave me alone, I'm going to quit." I decided, Well, if I'm going to have a good winemaker on the staff, I've got to let him do his thing. I can't be telling him what to do all the time and rushing out there and saying, "Hey, you're doing it the wrong way; I want it done this way." So for pretty much the last fifteen years, I've pretty much totally withdrawn with the actual winemaking decisions, techniques, et cetera.

I still determine the style of the wine: whether we're going to make an over-oaked Chardonnay or an under-oaked Chardonnay, whether we're going to add a new varietal, or whether we're going to make a Cabernet that's a lighter, more user-friendly style, or a more tannic, blockbuster style. Those are the things that I still determine, but I leave it up to Larry to do it. And, he's very happy.

Hicke: It seems you've established a well-balanced way of working together.

Stare: Yes. It's worked very well, yet I had to learn this lesson, that if I didn't do that, I was going to lose him.

Other Dry Creek Vineyard Wines

Hicke: I've got a list of different wines that you've made. Can you talk about the Cabernet Sauvignon a little bit? Are you going back to making that again?

Stare: Five years ago I would have said that we are 80 percent white wine, 20 percent red wine. Whether it's due to the French Paradox [60 Minutes program], or what, now red wines are much more in demand than white wines. Our production this past year was about 60 percent white and 40 percent red; so we're shifting gradually, and I wouldn't be surprised if by the year 2000 we're 55 percent white and 45 percent red. Maybe in another five, maybe in about ten years from now, it will be maybe 50/50.

Hicke: Cabernet Franc?

Stare: Cabernet Franc. We crush in a given year thirty to forty tons; we used to have about four acres of Cabernet Franc up by the house, which we've been replanting, starting in the latter part of the eighties. Some people never really liked Cabernet Franc. I kind of like it, it has kind of an herbaceous, stemmy quality. Larry doesn't like it, and the rest of our staff doesn't like it, and we gradually cut back on our Cabernet Franc. I budded over the Cabernet Franc that was at my house two years ago to Merlot, which we like very much.

We still have one contract grower we buy Cabernet Franc from, and I think the reason we buy it from him is we want to get his Zinfandel. I feel that whoever buys his Cabernet Franc is going to get the Zinfandel. His Zinfandel is classic, eighty-year-old, hillside, old-vine Zinfandel. That's the backbone of our Zinfandel program. Cabernet Franc is an okay wine, but nothing exciting. I happen to like Cabernet Franc, but most people don't.

Hicke: Let's talk about Zinfandel.

Stare: Zinfandel is a hot variety now, and when you consider that fact that there are probably, oh, not more than fifty thousand cases of really top-quality, red Zinfandel made in California, you can see there is room for a lot of growth there. The problem is, most of the really good Zinfandels are made from old, hillside, head-pruned, low-yielding vines planted prior to Prohibition, and yet these vineyards, by their very nature, are endangered species. In fact, our main Zinfandel supplier from the mid-seventies to the mid-eighties used to be a fellow, Jim Richwagon. Jim sold his vineyard about six or seven years ago to a fellow, Ron Martin, from southern California.

Ron moved up here and realized he could not afford to own the property for what he paid for it by only growing twenty-five tons a year Zinfandel. So in about '90, he bulldozed out all the old vines, spent a lot of money trellising and terracing and replanting the property to Cabernet, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc. He did put in a little bit of Zinfandel, but we had a contract to buy the fruit, and two years ago--it was last year--we kept saying, "Ron, you're overcropping, it's not going to ripen up. By the time the sugar gets up to acceptable level, the acid will drop way out, and the ph will be way high." He said, "If you don't want the grapes, I can sell them to someone else." And I said, "Fine, sell them to someone else; let's try it again next year." Well, that winter, since we broke a contract, he went elsewhere; so we lost that vineyard entirely now.

One of the things that Duff has done for us is he's spent a fair amount of time researching clones of Zinfandel. We've come up

with a clone, which is called the Heritage clone. It's a clone that he's traced back to Italian Swiss Colony days, and we know it has been around for well over a hundred years. One of our contract growers is Richard Rued--we buy Chardonnay from Richard--and Richard had this variety planted for about fifteen years; we know it's a pretty good yielder, in terms of yield per acre, and it also has a lot of the same fruit and wine characteristics of classic Zinfandel, a raspberry, blackberry quality to it.

We have seven acres that we planted last year next door, and we're going to put in another eight acres, down in Windsor on our new property. So we hope that by the year 2000, we'll have fifteen acres of our own Zinfandel, and that should give us probably seventy-five tons. When that comes into production, and if we continue on with the other Zinfandel vineyards that we have, we'll be processing probably two hundred tons a year of Zinfandel (12,000 cases). Right now we are producing about a hundred tons (6,000 cases). We can sell every bottle of Zinfandel we make.

Hicke: Too bad there isn't some way to age the vines like you age the wine [laughs]. How long will it be before those new vines produce?

Stare: Those rootstocks were put in eighteen months ago, and they were budded this past spring (twelve months ago). We'll get a small crop in '97 (ten tons). I'm looking for our five-year projection. In 1997 we'll get probably ten tons, and by the year 2000, we'll be getting, we figure, forty-eight tons. And we'll be growing about eighty tons of Zinfandel here ourselves in about five years.

Hicke: Are you still buying from growers?

Stare: Oh, we buy virtually all of our Zinfandel. As a general rule of thumb, we grow about half our Sauvignon Blanc, about half our Chardonnay, and about a quarter of our Cabernet. This year we grew about four hundred tons and bought about a thousand.

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IV DRY CREEK VINEYARD OPERATIONS

[Interview 2: January 12, 1996]##

Expansion in the 1970s

Hicke: Maybe we should just go back to the 1970s.

Stare: Okay.

Hicke: We actually got the winery built and the first vineyard planted, but maybe you could tell me about how the business expanded throughout the seventies.

Stare: Okay, yes. For the first building we finished, we broke ground in May of '73, and finished in August of '73, and, as I think I said yesterday, the actual first act that we ever did here was we bottled our 1972 Chardonnay, and I think I described the very antiquated equipment we had. That winter, the building had twenty to thirty barrels in it; it was very, very empty. We actually, at one time, tied a clothes line across the building and played tennis in there one day, making it an indoor tennis court.

Hicke: That's terrific. It's called "multiple-use."

Stare: Yes, "multiple-use" building, yes. We added red wine production in the fall of '73, which was Cabernet, Zinfandel, Merlot, and I think we also made a Gamay Beaujolais that year. We made a Gamay for about four or five years, strictly as a cash-flow wine. And in '74, we increased our production still more.

Now '74 was a particularly difficult year financially for the winery, because when I started the business, I prepared a five-year forecast, a cash-flow forecast, and we really didn't expect to have a positive cash flow until '76, or '77. We had a very hard time buying grapes. Grapes were at an all-time record high price in

'74, and I really wanted to increase our Cabernet production, and buy some good Cabernet, and couldn't afford to buy it.

So, I struck a deal with Frank Woods, who, at that time, had just started Clos du Blois Winery, to buy ten or fifteen tons of his Cabernet--not pay him for the grapes, but to make the wine and bottle it and sell back to him; I think it was 25 percent or 20 percent of the finished wine, and then he could put his own label on it and sell it. Well, as it turned out, the wine turned out to be superb wine, and the last thing I wanted to do was to sell back to Frank. I think in the last moment we came up with some cash and paid him in cash, but the wine happened to be a superb wine, still probably the best Cabernet we've ever made here.

Hicke: This is in '74?

Stare: Yes, '74. It came from his vineyard down on West Dry Creek Road. It just had a wonderful, rich complexity and nice character, and still, as I say, we probably have two or three cases in our library. And I still think it's even today, even though it's beginning to get over the hill, probably the best overall Cabernet we made.

In '75, we expanded a little. Each year we added another tank or two or three and increased our production. In '72 we made about thirteen hundred cases, in '73, about six thousand, in '74, probably about nine thousand, in '75, about twelve thousand, and it now developed that we needed another building.

A friend of mine, Dan Dehlinger, who's Tom Dehlinger's, the vintner's, brother--Dan had gone to school at U.C. Berkeley and was interested in architecture and construction. He had had a business in Berkeley, buying old homes and renovating and fixing them up and selling them. He moved up to Sonoma County and built Tom's winery, Dehlinger Winery, [and] he built Tom's house.

I approached him with the idea: why doesn't he build a new building for us as a contractor, even though he wasn't a licensed contractor? So we had the building designed by an architect, Dan Della, who had worked on the original project with Dick Keith, and in the summer and fall of '77, spring of '78, we built the second building, which is the one that we're now sitting in.

Hicke: That was the other building back there?

Stare: The first building was there, and then the second building is the one where we are now. After this building was built, the complex was shaped like a "T." I kind of figured if we keep in the shape

of a cross, if we could never make it as a winery, we could sell it to a church, and it would be a nice stone-looking cathedral.

Hicke: Another "multi-use."

Stare: Yes. We, actually, at one time, thought about putting a racquet ball court in here too [chuckles]. But we built this building we're now sitting in, beginning sometime summer or early fall of '77. Finished up in the spring of '78, and that became our white wine barrel cellar, bottling area, and our offices. Again, we continued to expand, and probably by '78 or '79, we were up to fifty, forty, fifty, sixty thousand cases.

Every year we would add one or two or three tanks, and our production increased, still sticking with the same varieties--we didn't do too much experimentation with varieties. The Beaujolais we made in, I think, '73, '74, '75, and '76; because it's a red wine, we could have it on the market by about February or March following harvest, and it was strictly a cash-flow wine. In '76 we dropped that, and stuck with the same three whites--the Chenin, the Fumé, and Chardonnay--and the reds--Cabernet, Merlot, and Zinfandel, and a little of Petite Sirah, which we usually blend in with the Zinfandel.

Continued Expansion in the Eighties

Stare: But in about '81 or '82, it became apparent we needed a third building, and by this time, the winery had begun to make some money and we were reasonably profitable. We built our third building essentially in the winter of '84 and the spring of '85. That's now where we store white wine barrels in the basement, and the ground floor is where we have our bottled wine, our shop, and what case storage we do here on the facility. When we bottle we ship wine immediately to the Sonoma County Vintner's Co-op in Windsor, and right now, that's where we store virtually all of our finished case goods. What we keep here at the winery is only what we sell here in the tasting room. We probably have here, oh, five, six hundred cases, but down at the co-op we probably have seventy-five to eighty thousand cases now.

Hicke: The ones you keep here are for sale here?

Stare: Strictly for sale in the tasting room and a wine library we keep here.

In October of '84, I spent two weeks in France with a wine writer friend of mine, in Burgundy, observing the harvest. She was doing a series of articles for, I think, *Harpers Bazaar* magazine. And one of the things that impressed me about Burgundy was that virtually all of the cellars in Burgundy were underground. I came back wanting to put in an underground wine cellar.

So, we re-designed the building, and our bottling building now has a basement which is twenty feet wide and eighty feet long. We store some barrels down there, and have a wine library down there, too. I kind of wish I had made it the full basement. Our winemaker, Larry Levin, thinks it's a real nuisance because it's hard to get barrels up and down. We've got a trap door system, where we use a fork lift to raise barrels up and down. It's kind of pain, but it's also kind of nice, in a way.

That building was built and finished in the spring of '85. And we continued to expand. And then, our tasting room--when I first started, our tasting room was just a couple of barrels by the front entrance, by the lab.

Tasting Room

Hicke: You had a tasting room right away?

Stare: Yes. We started off with a tasting room right away, although it wasn't a room, it was just a corner of a cellar where we had a couple of barrels and a couple of bottles. It was very informal; we had nobody really working here as a tasting room person, although whoever was in the cellar, if someone showed up, would stop and pour the wine.

I'd say by the mid-seventies, we added someone. We used to do all of our labeling by hand, and that person also put the labels on the bottles when they weren't waiting on a customer.

But again, in the late eighties it became evident that we needed a more formal tasting room. So we built the current tasting room; that was built in the spring and summer of '89 and was actually inaugurated by my fiftieth birthday party, which happened to coincide with the annual dinner put on by the Sonoma County Wineries Association for the Sonoma County Harvest Fair judges. We probably had 120 people here in the courtyard for dinner. It happened to be my birthday, a lot of fun.

In the wine business, you build a building, and then you immediately out-grow it, and I wish our tasting room was 50 percent larger than it is. It's adequate on winter weekdays, but during the summer and on the weekends, it's too crowded, too small.

Hicke: The bar is beautiful, the way you've used the case ends from different wineries.

Stare: Yes. That's very nice. A lot of those case ends--I mentioned earlier, when I first got seriously interested in business, I worked for a wine shop back in Boston. Most of those case ends I got when I was a stock clerk at this wine shop. Most Bordeaux wines are shipped in wooden cases, and we unpacked the bottles and put them on the shelf, and we'd have all this kindling left over, and I used to save wooden case ends, because I figured someday I could use them, and there in the bar there, we've still got some.

Hicke: I've got a few I picked up too, some from Bordeaux.

Stare: One of reasons that it's kind of fun to look at those is that quite often you'll see either my handwriting or someone else's handwriting on it. It'll say 12 times \$3.99--\$3.99 was the value of wine, retail value, and there were twelve bottles in a case. A Bordeaux you could buy, back in '69, '70, and '71, for four to eight dollars a bottle. Today, those wines are thirty to sixty dollars a bottle.

Hicke: Or forty to eighty [chuckles].

The Nineties

Stare: We kind of got off here.

Hicke: We were building the tasting room, the new tasting room.

Stare: Yes, anyway, we finished that in the fall of '89, and again continued to expand, and by the early nineties, by '92, or '93, we were beginning to lease space elsewhere. We needed to have more barrel storage, so we leased a warehouse in Healdsburg. It used to be part of the old J.W. Morris Winery, which had gone bankrupt or closed sometime in the late 1980s or early 1990s. There were several large buildings which were fairly ideal for wine storage, and we leased one of those, and, for a while, stored all our red wine barrels in Healdsburg. It was a real nuisance in that we had to truck the barrels in; we'd fill the barrels here, load them into a trailer truck, truck them down there, and they have a fork lift

down there. It became evident we needed to build another building here, but we had no place to put the thing.

Along came my friendly neighbor, Dan Pedroni, who is a guy that, I guess, we had never gotten along with. I don't really know the source of our friction; I think probably it came back in the late seventies. Dan had bought or inherited this piece of property from his uncle, Alfonso. And when I bought the original ranch here from Mrs. Howe, she had told me that Alfonso Pedroni was interested in selling the neighboring parcel, the neighboring fourteen acres.

I went and introduced myself to Alfonso, and he said he'd be happy to sell it to me for the same price that I bought Mrs. Howe's property for. I went back and had my attorney friend, Steve Adams, draw up a purchase and sale agreement, and I took it up the next week day to Alfonso. At that point he decided he wanted another thousand bucks per acre for it. I think I chased him once; I added a thousand bucks per acre, resubmitted the purchase and sale agreement, and he decided he wanted fifteen hundred dollars more per acre. I finally said, The hell with you. Anyway, Dan ultimately got the property from his uncle. I don't know whether he had inherited it or he had bought it, but at that time it was a prune orchard, and Dan put in grapes in the late seventies.

He also wanted to build a house down by the creek, and he came to me and said, "Dave, I want permission to string power wires over your property." I said, "No, I'd be very happy to grant you permission to put them underground if you'd pay for the undergrounding, but I don't want wires running across our property." He got kind of upset, and I guess had to pay P.G.&E. to bring electricity in from the road, which is a lot longer run from Dry Creek Road to his house than from across our area. That's probably the original source of our friction.

He built a very nice house down there, and was continually a pain, you might say. We'd have our Spring Open House, and I'm not sure whether he planned it or not, but he decided he'd be sulfuring the same day we had our Spring Open House, and clouds of sulfur would drift over onto our property; or he'd be disking, and clouds of dust came over. It seemed that he was out to annoy us.

It culminated in about 1990 with the fact that we decided to expand our tank farm and put in some more tanks. At that time, our tank farm was twenty feet from the back property line. We expanded to within about six feet of our back property line, and built a wall and tank pad. I didn't really get the right use permits from the county. And Dan protested.

We had it finished before the county could stop us, and we used it. We then entered a fairly protracted, long period of

haggling with the county planning people and with Dan Pedroni. We were fortunate in that the zoning ordinance for here requires a twenty-foot setback in the front and backyard but only a five-foot setback in the side yard.

We argued with the county that as far we're concerned, the front of this property fronts on Dry Creek Road, not on Lambert Bridge Road. If you agree that the property fronts on Dry Creek Road, then that becomes a side setback and the wall was legal. If you define the front of the property as being at Lambert Bridge Road, then the wall was illegal. Anyway, we eventually got the county to agree to allow it to stay put, and we were severely reprimanded for not doing things according to the way they're supposed to be done.

Continuing the Dan saga, I'd say probably about '91, or '92, I got a call from an attorney friend of mine in town saying that Dan Pedroni wanted to sell his property, was I interested. And I said, "Yes." And he said, "Well, he wants \$950,000." I thought, Well that's probably \$150,000 more than it's worth, but I think it's worth it for me to buy it just to get rid of him.

So we bought the property, in '91 or '92, I think, and proceeded to do a lot line adjustment. We annexed onto the original winery parcel about two and a half acres from Dan's parcel. We have right now, here in Dry Creek Valley, a twenty-acre minimum per dwelling unit to try to prevent mass development and to prevent suburbia from coming here. The winery parcel was eleven and a half acres, and the Pedroni parcel was fourteen and a half acres, and I wanted originally to join the two, and they wouldn't let us do that. But they did allow me to make the winery parcel the size of the Pedroni parcel and reduce the Pedroni parcel by that same amount.

So we annexed a strip of land about 150 feet wide and about 700 feet long onto the existing parcel, and then began planning to build two more buildings. We finished one this past summer, which is a 5,000 square-foot, pre-fab metal building, where we now store most of our red wine barrels. Either this year or next year, depending on how much wine we can sell, how much money we can make, we'll build another 5,000-square-foot building. These two buildings will then be connected with a 3,000-square-foot breezeway. So that will give us 13,000 square feet of barrel storage area. We moved most of our red wine barrels back to the location here. We still have a few hundred in town, and now we'll get everything on site here, which is one of our goals.

Hicke: Okay, so that's the property expansion.

Stare: Our file at the planning department has always been kind of screwed up, as far as I'm concerned. They used to have a planner by the name of Lloyd Johnson. Lloyd was a very nice fellow, he loved good wine, but he seemed to always have a personal vendetta in for Dry Creek, because he wanted us to pave everything. He wanted the parking lot to be paved, the driveway to be paved.

I said, "Lloyd, people don't want to come to the wine country and see paved roads. They want gravel road, they want dirt roads, they want to get their feet dirty."

And then he would say, "Well, what about the people stepping in puddles of water during the winter, and getting their feet wet?" And I said, "Well, that should be my decision as a businessman; if I want them to get their feet wet, that's my prerogative. Obviously, I don't want to spend the money to pave."

"Well, what about the dust?" I'd say, "Fine, who's complaining about the dust? The grapevines certainly don't complain. When you have some neighbors who are legitimately complaining about dust, then it should become an issue, but as long as nobody is complaining about it, it's not an issue."

Anyway, Lloyd passed away in the late seventies, and I think he had probably taken our file home from the County Planning Department to study it. It was home when he passed away. Anyway, when we went back to build our bottling area in '83, they had no record of Dry Creek ever having had a file. They couldn't find it, and we had to make photocopies of some of the department documents in our file of our original use permits and the subsequent additions.

Eventually when we built our last building, the tasting room, they slapped a maximum size of 120,000 cases a year being able to be made in this facility, and actually in '91 we produced a little bit over that. But we've been averaging 110,000 to 115,000 cases of wine at this facility since about 1991. Our plan for the future is probably stay at that level [for a while], but gradually to grow up to 150,000.

We would have to get the use permit amended if we wanted to do it legally. The planning process is so much hocus-pocus, it's ridiculous. They make it so hard. I know that half the wineries in Sonoma County don't go through the Wine Department when they do something, they just go ahead and do it.

Hicke: How do you arrive at the number of cases to produce? Is that a financial decision, or quality-control decision, or a grape-availability decision?

Stare: All of the above. I can recall the Thanksgiving of 1974, I got a call from Maynard Amerine at home--we had just finished Thanksgiving dinner--saying he wanted to come visit the winery Friday morning and bring--it was either Ernest or Julio Gallo, one of the Gallos. They wanted to see the winery, and I said, "Okay, I'll see you tomorrow morning at 8:30." So I left my house, drove back down here, and spent an hour or so sweeping the winery out and making sure the bathroom was clean, making sure we had clean glasses, and generally straightening up.

I was down here bright and early Friday morning, and sure enough, Mr. Gallo drives up in what looked like a mile-long, hearty-burgundy-colored Cadillac limousine. The chauffeur steps out and opens the door, and Maynard gets out, and Mr. and Mrs. Gallo, and again, I'm not sure whether it was Julio or Ernest. I showed them around the winery, and we tasted a few wines. They were here for probably forty-five minutes. And then Mr. Gallo says, "Dave, what's your current production, and what are your plans?" I said, "Well, our current production is 8,000 cases, and our plan is to grow to twenty." He said, "You're not going to want to stop at twenty; believe me, we've been through it." [Chuckles]

So, to answer your question, how did we arrive at 120,000 cases, I don't really know. That's what the county has slapped upon us, and we've been at that production level for the last four or five years. I think part of the reason we've been staying at that level is our principle banker is Pacific Coast Farm Credit, and they have been harping for the last three or four years, "Dave, you've got to stop growing in cases. Raise your prices, but don't grow in the number of cases." Our increased revenue, in the last few years, has been generated by selling more cases at the same price. They say, You've got to raise your prices. We've been on a concerted effort in the last couple of years to increase our margins, and when you increase your prices, that tends to slow down your increase in sales.

But I think for the next year or two, we'll stay at roughly our current size. I wouldn't be surprised if by the year 2000, or shortly into the next decade, we'll be up to 140, 150,000. Certainly the demand is there. I've been going over allocations of our reserve Merlot and Zinfandel the last couple of days with Gary, and we could easily sell double or triple the amounts of those wines.

Hicke: Okay, so the demand--

Stare: Demand. Demand is definitely there, and it's funny, since being in business in '72, every year we've had an increase in sales, even in

the years when the wine industry had a downturn. Our 1994 results were about 27 percent above '93 in terms of total sales and revenue. I figured when I did our sales projections a year ago for '95, I thought we'd be down about 7 percent, just because of lack of inventory. And we were up another 6 percent. For '96, I think we'll be up a little bit, say 5-10 percent; in '97, we may have to fall back just because of not having the wine to sell, that depends upon the 1996 harvest. The demand is definitely there now.

Hicke: Have you ever thought of going public, or being bought out?

Stare: Yes, yes, but not really. I would say six times a year I get a telephone call or a letter from a real estate agent. I used to get it from Lou Gomberg before he passed away. Lou used to represent the big buyers--if someone wanted to get into the wine business with lots of money, they'd hire Lou to find them a property. I would say six times a year I would get what I would call a serious sales solicitation for someone wanting to buy the winery. "Dave, I've got a European investor who wants to buy a winery in, roughly, the 100,000 case range. Dry Creek is on the list of properties he's interested in. Are you interested in selling?" Usually, I say, "No, not really." Occasionally, I say, "How much has he got available?" [Laughter]

Hicke: Depending on what the day looks like!

Stare: Yes, I mean, everything's for sale at a price. But to answer your question, no, we're not seriously for sale. Obviously, if someone came along and offered double what I think the place is worth, then I'd be a fool not to sell. On the other hand, I'm very happy, it's a fun business, I still enjoy it. I feel fortunate that my oldest daughter is active in the business and is very good, and I think she will ultimately have the ability to take over and run the property, run the winery. I suppose if she were not interested in it, I mean, I'm fifty-six, and I'm approaching the time that, I guess, a lot of successful businessmen think about slowing down and retiring.

Hicke: Or sailing.

Stare: Or sailing. Yes, well, I've also been bitten by the golf bug, and I wouldn't mind living in Florida a few months of the year and being able to golf and sail down there. But as I said, we're not really for sale.

Growth of Vineyards

Hicke: Let's go back and review the vineyards, just to put it all together.

Stare: The initial seventy-seven acres of property that I bought, I planted out to just a shade less than fifty acres of vineyard. In '73, we planted DCV 3 and DCV 4, which was a twenty-acre block and a fifteen-acre block. DCV 3 was originally planted to half Sauvignon Blanc and half Chenin Blanc, the two varieties that the local farm advisor didn't want planted out here. And in DCV 4, we put in about thirteen acres of Chardonnay. And then, in '74, this property, the winery parcel, was planted--that's called DCV 2--it was planted to Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. That was all the planted acreage. In 1984 or '85, Dan Pedroni, my neighbor whom I never got along with, owned a thirty-five-acre parcel in the Alexander Valley, and it came up for sale, and I bought it. Even though Dan and I couldn't get along, I bought everything Dan's ever owned out here.

Hicke: Yes! [Laughter]

Stare: We bought that in I think '84, or '85, and when we bought it, it was planted to twenty acres Chenin Blanc, and ten acres of Chardonnay. By this time it was apparent that with Chenin Blanc, you just couldn't make the profit as well here. You can't afford to keep land that's worth 20,000 bucks an acre tied up in growing a grape which is worth 400 dollars a ton, certainly when you can buy the grape from the Sacramento area at that price and make good wine from it.

So we bought it and converted that vineyard to fifteen acres of Chardonnay, and fifteen acres of Sauvignon Blanc. That got our total vineyard acres up to about eighty acres. We had started with fifty, and we bought thirty over there, which makes it up to eighty.

I had up by my house, which is a mile south of here on West Dry Creek Road, a twenty-two-acre parcel, of which there was about seven or eight acres of open meadow in the front of the house which I had never bothered to plant. Sometime in late '84, '85, we decided to go ahead and plant that. We planted that originally to two acres of Merlot and about five acres of Cabernet Sauvignon and about an acre and a half of Cabernet Franc.

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Stare: That was planted sometime in '84 or '85. Then we bought Pedroni's property in about '91. That had about eleven acres of vineyard on it. When we bought it, it came with about three acres of Chardonnay and about eight acres of Zinfandel, although most of the Zinfandel was the Davis clone, which was developed by Davis fifteen years ago; it has very big bunches, more suitable for white Zinfandel than red Zinfandel--we had no desire to make white Zinfandel. And when we bought it, we knew that it had phylloxera, so we had to replant it. Two years ago, we tore out the old Davis clone of Zinfandel, fumigated the soil, and replanted it last year to the so-called Heritage clone of Zinfandel; I think I talked about it yesterday. That will come into production, hopefully, next year. That got our vineyard acreage up to just about a hundred acres, with the addition of that piece.

This past summer we bought a thirty-seven-acre dairy ranch in Windsor, and I'm in the process of planting. When that's fully productive, we'll have probably 135 acres of vineyard. That will be planted the spring of '96 to about twenty acres of Sauvignon Blanc and about five acres of Merlot. And then there's about nine acres on that ranch, which because it was dairy ranch, the actual pen, where the cows are kept penned up, the levels of cow shit [chuckles]--

Hicke: Fertilizer!

Stare: Fertilizer, yes! Too rich, too fertile, and we have to let that land lie fallow for two or three years before we can plant it. It's too rich for grapes, and we'll hold off planting that for a couple of years, and hopefully the levels of uric acid and other stuff in there will drop to a level where it won't be harmful to grapevines.

I think one of the mistakes that I made in this business was when we became profitable during the early to mid-eighties, I was not terribly aggressive in buying additional vineyard property. I remember looking at one absolutely gorgeous, forty-acre parcel on hillside property on Dry Creek Road, about two miles north of here. That came up for sale, and I think they were asking \$14,000 an acre for it. I thought, I'm not going to pay that, that's too damn much; I'm not going to pay fourteen grand. Now it's worth twenty-five grand. There have been two or three incidents like that, where I thought property was just overpriced, and I wasn't willing to pay the price, but now I kick myself for not having done it because it's worth twice as much.

Hicke: So you buy a lot of grapes, as you've said.

Stare: Yes. I think one of our, let's say, potential weaknesses is that we are dependent for about two-thirds of our grapes on outside contractor growers.

Hicke: How much is that?

Stare: We grow, right now--well probably not right now because we've got some land out of production due to phylloxera replanting--we normally grow about a third of our grapes. I think when the Windsor parcel is in production, we'll probably grow, oh, I'll have 130 acres of vineyard, so we'll probably grow close to 40 percent of our own grapes, if we stay at the 120,000 case level. If good vineyard parcels become available at a price that's at all justifiable economically, we'll be interested in buying them.

One of the main changes that has occurred in the wine industry over the last twenty-five years is that when I started, the people who were getting involved were the people that were interested in wine and had a little bit of money to play with. I started the winery with money that I had inherited from my mother when she died. I did not have vast sums to work with. I went into the wine business to make money. There's a joke that's told amongst vintners: the way to make a little bit of money in the wine business is you start off with a lot of money, and get into the business, and then make a little bit of money. That, to a large extent, is true.

When you look at a lot of the wineries that have been built over the last ten to fifteen years, they have been started by people who have made a ton of money doing something else.

For my way of thinking, I want to make money in this wine business, and I'm competing with people who have a lot more resources, which makes it harder for us. I think a lot of vintners who started up in the early-to mid-seventies were people like myself, who enjoy wine, who had a little bit of money to play with, as opposed to people today who are getting in the business--like Joe Montana just bought a 500-acre ranch up in the Knight's Valley. He supposedly wants to ultimately plant a Merlot vineyard and have a Montana Merlot, and I'm sure Joe has got tons of money to play with.

Hicke: To lose.

Stare: Yes, to lose, and I don't have tons of money to lose.

Hicke: There's a difference in making a living and having a hobby.

Stare: Yes. A lot of the more recent wineries are more hobbies than making a living.

Working With Growers

Hicke: Let me ask you a little bit about your relationship with growers. As you expanded your vineyards, you had to expand your numbers of growers?

Stare: Most of our growers we have been buying from for a long time. We have about twenty, twenty-five outside contract growers, most of them under what we call a three-year, evergreen contract, which means that unless either side notifies the other side of a desire to terminate the contract, it automatically extends for one more year. And if either side wants to terminate the contract, they've got to give written notice sent by registered mail before the end of the year, and upon notification, the winery is obligated to buy, and the grower is obligated to sell the grapes for two more years. We just were notified that one of our contract growers that we've been buying from since the mid-seventies did desire to terminate the contract. But he's obligated to sell us grapes in '96 and '97, according to the terms of the agreement.

One of the other things that's kind of unique about our contract--maybe not--is the contract contains a formula for setting the price of grapes. It is based upon the annual grape crush price report. We just finished a report that shows that we bought 5.7 tons of Cabernet at 1,500 bucks a ton, 28.4 tons of Cabernet at 1,450. These are all summed by the State Department of Agriculture, and they publish a final grape price report, which lists the Sonoma County average for Cabernet and gives how many tons were sold at what price. You have a whole range of prices. It doesn't say who paid it--that information is confidential--but you see a whole price spectrum, you know, .2 percent of the Cabernet in Sonoma County sold for 2,000 bucks a ton. And 1.2 percent was sold at 1,900 dollars a ton.

Our grape pricing is based upon the average Sonoma County price for that grape. In other words, I paid, in 1995, for most of our Sauvignon Blanc, a price based upon the 1994 average price. That is known in March--the report comes out in March of the following year. So when the 1995 report comes out in March '96, our growers will know what they're going to get paid for the grapes. They can't come to me and say, "Dave, I think they are worth a hundred bucks more per ton." And I can't go them and say,

"George, I think they are worth a hundred bucks less per ton." It takes the haggling out of it which is good; I don't like to haggle.

Hicke: If all the contracts are based on this sort of thing, how does it change?

Stare: Well, right now there is a shortage of grapes because of phylloxera, and the price of Sauvignon Blanc probably may go up a hundred bucks a ton this year.

Hicke: But how could it if it's based on last year's average?

Stare: As the average moves, so does our price but with a one year delay. Over the life of the contract it averages out to be fair.

Hicke: Oh, okay, I thought this was general.

Stare: No, no. I'm sure this one grower notified us because he feels that in '96 and '97, the price per ton is going to be higher than what we've been paying for it. But I still think the system works. When grape prices are going down, and '91, '92, '93 grape prices gradually drifted downward, we tended to overpay for the grapes. The price one year was 750, the next year was 725; we paid 750.

I think, over a ten- or fifteen-year period, it'll average out. But I think growers tend to be a little bit short-sighted when they hear that their neighbor is getting a hundred bucks more per ton--they want that. They're willing to forget the fact that when everybody else was depressed, they got paid more. We've got to get together with this grower, and we'll probably end up renegotiating the price upwards somewhat.

You always hear horror stories. Back in the early seventies, I think this was one of the reasons why Windsor Vineyards, Rodney Strong, went out of business, and went bankrupt--they got locked into some very high, long-term, grape purchase contracts, and agreed to pay 1,000 bucks a ton for Chardonnay and Cabernet, when, in fact, the average price was 500 bucks a ton.¹ They just couldn't live with that. I want to avoid that kind of pitfall.

But a lot of our contract growers are friends, a couple of them are reasonably close friends: Dr. Zielger, Dave Olson, Charles Green. They come to dinner at my house, I go for dinner at their

¹See "Rodney Strong Vineyards: Creative Winemaking and Winery Management in Sonoma County," an oral history conducted in 1993 by Carole Hicke, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1994.

house, we're good friends. Some of them are more strictly a business transaction, but all of them, I think, are very good people, they're quality-oriented growers, and they do a good job.

There used to be a wine writer, Alexis Lichine, a French-American who was very influential--one of the first people who really started writing about wines back in the fifties, and one of the first wine books I ever bought was his *Wines of France*. It is a wonderful book. He talks a lot in there about estate bottling, saying that estate-grown grapes are far superior to non-estate-grown grapes. I don't believe that. I think that there are good growers out there, and there are not-so-good growers, and a good grower can do just as well. Maybe the estate-bottled wine you can sell for a dollar or two more a bottle, but it doesn't necessarily mean that it's a better wine than something that's not estate-bottled.

As you know, there are wineries that own all their own vineyards. One that comes to mind--I won't mention the name--a friend of mine used to be the winemaker there, and his boss was always complaining, "How come we don't win a gold medal at the Sonoma County Harvest Fair? Why don't we win a gold medal at the L.A. County Fair?" And my friend answered back, "Well, the reason is you make me use all these grapes, and frankly, out of the 400 tons of Chardonnay grapes we grow, we've got 100 tons of very good Chardonnay grapes, 200 tons of good Chardonnay grapes, and 100 tons of terrible Chardonnay grapes, but you make me use it all!" So being estate-bottled doesn't necessarily mean good.

Hicke: Yes. Good point.

Stare: Have I talked enough about growers?

Hicke: Yes. There's only one further question, which maybe has more to do with winemaking; I understand that you like a diversity of vineyards for blending.

Stare: Yes. One of the things that we do is we buy grapes from Grower George, Grower Pete, Grower Dan, Grower Phyllis, and they're all fermented and barrel-aged separately. So we have at any one time twenty-five different lots of Chardonnay, twenty-five different lots of Sauvignon Blanc, fifteen different lots of Cabernet, and they're all held separately, and you begin to pick up the individual characteristics of those vineyards.

If there is a vineyard that is continually weak, we try to get our vineyard manager involved, and help the grower. Maybe we should try a different fertilizer program, or maybe more leaf thinning, or more of this, or more of that. Our policy is to work

with the grower, have him improve his quality, and if we ultimately can't do it, then we will stop buying from him.

We had one grower, whom I will not mention by name, who owned what should have been, at least on paper it looked that way, a superb Cabernet vineyard. On a hillside, it was one of the oldest plantings in Dry Creek Valley. The vineyard came up for sale ten or twelve, maybe fifteen years ago; we looked at it, actually made an offer on it, which was rejected as being too low. It was bought by someone else, and I figured Hey, if they're going to buy the vineyard, we'll buy the grapes. We'll get what we want without having to have our money tied up in the vineyard.

As it turned out, the vineyard was a terrible vineyard. They were the worst grapes of that variety, and for a while, they were a fairly significant part of our production of that varietal. Probably the quality of that varietal suffered because we used those grapes. We worked with it for four or five years, and got people over from Davis to try and improve it, but couldn't do anything, couldn't change, and so we stopped buying from them a few years ago.

Hicke: Was it the soil or the grapes?

Stare: Nobody knows, nobody knows. In the grapes, when they reached the desired level sugar maturity, the acid was very low, the ph was very high, and it just made a very flat, insipid wine; nobody really knows why, but we tried many things to improve the quality.

Hicke: Well, you were lucky on that one!

Stare: And that's why I say though, owning your vineyard doesn't necessarily mean it's better.

Don Wallace

Hicke: That's right. Well, I know that Don Wallace is your ranch manager.

Stare: Don is my son-in-law. He has the title of ranch manager.

Hicke: Yes, I wondered, is that the same as vineyard manager? What is that?

Stare: No, no. It's a title--Don wanted to come to work for me, and virtually all Don's adult life had been spent as a heavy equipment operator and a construction foreman. His dad was a construction

foreman, he'd do various jobs for Bechtel all over the world, and Don, as a kid, lived in Venezuela and other places. He had done that work since about the age of seventeen. He wanted to get out of it and come to work for me, so I said, "Fine. Go work for some other winery first." He did work for Tim Murphy at Murphy-Goode for a year, helped out in the vineyards and did mechanical farm machinery repair, helped lay out vineyards, and did a lot of vineyard work.

Then when he came to work for me three years ago, he had the title of ranch manager. Unfortunately, it really didn't work out; he kind of stepped on people's toes. Duff Bevill, our vineyard manager, didn't want him monkeying in his territory. Larry Levin, our winemaker, didn't want him monkeying in his area. For a while, Don had a job but really didn't have a job.

He has, over the last year and a half, gotten a lot more involved in sales, and has done very well; he basically has the wrong title now. He's become involved in sales, and I gave him, about a year ago, about four or five problem markets where we had not been growing, and he started making some sales calls and going to the markets and working the markets. The three principal states were Louisiana, Texas, and Colorado--all three areas where our sales have been drifting downward. I must admit he has turned our sales dramatically up in all three states. He's done a very good job at that.

Don is a very personable guy, and people get along with him very well. All these salesmen, these distributors would become Kim and Don's personal friends--they are always calling him at home--and it's worked out. Don is being steered much more in the direction of sales, and I think we'll eventually drop the term ranch manager. Duff does our vineyards. Don is heading for our sales manager position.

Anything dealing with the property that's not vineyards falls under Don's territory. If we have a road that needs to be rebuilt, that's Don's territory. The winery actually owns two rental houses now. We own the original house where Zita [Eastman] lives, and one that came with the Windsor Dairy Ranch, and Don is responsible for fixing those up and making sure that anything wrong gets fixed; the one in Windsor had a fair amount of work to do on it before we could rent it out. He's in charge of the ranch, but not the vineyards, if you see what I mean.

Hicke: That's an interesting idea. In a winery, it seems like a lot of people's jobs would intersect.

Stare: They do, and I think one of the characteristics of the most successful winemakers and vineyard managers is that they probably have fairly big egos. They don't want people coming into their territory and telling them what to do. Don, for a while, was trying to help out in grape buying, and that really ruffled Larry's feathers. I think our winemaker should be the primary person who determines what grapes we buy. They make the styles of wine that I tell them we want to make. Don ruffled Larry's feathers, but he has found a niche, and it appears he does very, very well in sales, and that's where he's going to be going.

Meritage Wines

Hicke: Okay, let's go back a bit to the wines, and I'd like to ask you about developing a Meritage wine, which you started very early on.

Stare: We [pause] started developing a line of reserve wines; I think our first reserve wine was a reserve Cab, which we came out with in '77 or '78. And then we had an estate reserve Merlot of 1980, and maybe a reserve Chardonnay, but began our current reserve program in '82, with a reserve Chardonnay and a reserve red wine, which was roughly a fifty-fifty blend of Cabernet and Merlot.

Hicke: What did reserve start out to mean?

Stare: Well, oh, five bucks more per bottle. [Laughter] Other than that, to me, the term reserve means something that is the best effort in that variety for a given year, something that's head and shoulders above regular quality for that wine. Our reserve Cabernet is richer, more fully flavored than the regular Cabernet. In the reserve Chardonnay, you see more barrel aging, it has a higher percentage of malolactic, and is a richer, fuller style of wine, more buttery. Typically a reserve sells at, oh, 40 to 60 percent higher than the regular bottling. Our current Cabernet I think retails at an un-discounted price for about fourteen [dollars], our reserve Cabernet is twenty-two, reserve Chardonnay is about seventeen, our regular Chardonnay, about thirteen. But the reserves are richer, more concentrated, typically oakies, a bigger style of wine.

Hicke: But you started out answering my question about Meritage and we got into reserve wine.

Stare: Our first red wine, in the current program, was a 1982 Dry Creek reserve red.

Hicke: That was the first blending?

Stare: Yes, the Meritage concept had not been developed at that time. We had that wine, we had an '83 reserve red, an '84 reserve red, and we had an '85 reserve red, but we were going to release the '88. The Meritage concept came along in about '88. These were blends made from traditional Bordeaux varieties, and they were the best lots of the best wines of the winery from that year. Since we didn't have a proprietary reserve name like Opus One or Insignia or Cardinal, we just called our wines "Meritage," and put it on the front label in fairly large letters. Our '85 reserve red was actually bottled, labeled, and foiled, and we went to the expense of soaking off the labels, tearing off the foils, and re-foiling it and re-labeling it with the first of our diagonal reserve labels.

Hicke: The diagonal labels--we didn't talk about that, that's Meritage wine.

Stare: The diagonal label is on all of our reserve wines. That was Kim's idea. It's been a great idea.

Hicke: But how did the Meritage concept start?

Stare: Dan Burger, who was a wine writer for the *L.A. Times*, wrote an article back in '86, '87, essentially stating that there was a need for a name for a class of wine style made in the traditional Bordeaux blend, really traditional Bordeaux wines. By this time, the varietal requirement had been raised to 75 percent. In order to call a wine a Cabernet, it's got to be 75 percent Cabernet. I believe, right now, that there's a movement to try to raise that to 85 percent. But there was a need for having a name for a blended red wine from Bordeaux.

Berger's original suggestion was to call these wines "elevage" wines. "Elevage" is a French term, meaning that the blend is better than any one of the parts. The blend elevates the wine to a higher plane. I think Murphy-Goode actually bottled some wine with the "elevage" name on it. The name was rapidly and completely dropped when someone realized that "elevage" had another meaning in French, having something to do with sheep breeding.

Hicke: Oh, great.

Stare: The name was dropped, and then a contest was held by the Meritage Association to come up with a name: What do we call this class of wines, made in the vision of Bordeaux? They had to be blends, generally less than 75 percent of any variety, so you couldn't call it a Cabernet, or a Merlot.

Hicke: But very fine wine.

Stare: Yes, but top-notch wine, and someone suggested "Meritage," wines of merit made from the heritage of Bordeaux. Kind of a bastardized word made up of "heritage," and "merit." That term was adopted, and at that time, we were looking for a proprietary name for our reserve red wine, and we jumped on the Meritage bandwagon wholeheartedly, and put the term "Meritage" in large letters on the label.

It took the Meritage concept a fair amount time to get off the ground. Some of the more important wine writers always thought it was ridiculous, and other writers liked it, and it sputtered, and at Dry Creek it sputtered. We had a hard time selling the wines until two years ago. I think the name has finally caught on, and people know what it is, and we came out with our Meritage, and within a month we sold out of it. I think the term is a significant one; it has taken on a special meaning as quality wines, and we're going to start increasing our production of Meritage quite a bit while still maintaining our high quality.

Hicke: When you first started the reserve reds called red table wine, which you would think would not be a fine wine, did you find resistance to that not being a true varietal?

Stare: Yes, there was, and part of the initial program in '82, '83, and '84, was we came out with David S. Stare--you looked at the label and the thing that stood out was David S. Stare, not Dry Creek Vineyards. That was a mistake. We should have made Dry Creek Vineyards stand out, and my name much less prominent. The current reserve packaging emphasizes Dry Creek more than anything else.

Hicke: But maybe part of the acceptance is the acceptance that a blended wine can be better than a varietal.

Stare: Oh, yes, I think so. The Meritage Association probably has forty members in it today. There are a few wineries that make Meritage-style wines that are not members--Mondavi would be the perfect example--but I think the concept has come of age. It is definitely one which we'll see a lot more of in the future.

Merlot

Hicke: Okay, let's talk about a couple of your other wines--the Merlot, to start with and I read that your 1991 won Le Grand Prix d'Honneur.

Stare: Yes. We have made Merlot here since '74. We marketed, I think, in '74, '75, and '76, just a few hundred cases of Merlot each year. Then we dropped the Merlot for '77, '78, and '79, just used it to blend in with the Cabernet, and brought it back out in 1980. From about '80 to '87, we would make about a thousand cases a year of Merlot, a pretty small part of our production, but it always sold very quickly. We're selling out in a month, so let's make more of it. Thus we began to increase our production.

When we were talking about vineyards a while back, I think I forgot to mention that in 1988 we bought a twelve-and-a-half-acre vineyard from Lambert Bridge winery, which is right across Lambert Bridge Road from the winery here. When we bought that vineyard it was planted to Johannesburg Riesling.

Johannesburg Riesling is a varietal which is definitely going out of favor, even though it made a very nice wine. We bought the vineyard with a contract to sell the grapes to Gallo, although, we did make, that year, ten tons here. It made a very nice Riesling, but it didn't sell well. We decided to T-bud it over in '89 to Merlot.

Our Merlot, in back of the winery, the vineyard that I put in in '74, had always been just a wonderful, rich Merlot, the best Merlot. We propagated the bud wood and used that bud wood over in our new vineyard. It was T-budded in '87, and we got a small crop off it in '90. In '91, it came on strong, and that has traditionally been our best Merlot. We get between fifty and sixty tons off that vineyard. The '91 reserve, which won the Grand Prix d'Honneur at the Expo wine tasting last year, was 100 percent from that vineyard. Our 1993 Merlot is 100 percent from that vineyard. The 1994 will probably be 100 percent from that vineyard.

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Sonoma County Soleil

Hicke: Well, the next one I want to mention is the Sonoma County Soleil.

Stare: Soleil is the French word for sun. One of my favorite wine types has always been a good Sauternes or Barsac from France, or a Coteaux du Layon from the Loire Valley, or a Beerenauslese, or a Trockenbeerenauslese from Germany. These are wines which are infected with *Botrytis cinerea*, noble rot, and it causes the grapes to shrivel up and lose water, with the remaining sugar being

concentrated. That's how you make these sweet wines. I've always liked that style of wines.

In 1983, we were presented with climatic conditions which encouraged the growth of *Botrytis cinerea*, and we made I'd say about two or three hundred cases, a very small batch. The wine tasted very nice, but it developed a horrible orange color, a very dark, burnt orange color. Even though the wine tasted great, it did not have a very good color in it. Fortunately, we didn't have very much of it.

In '85, there was a surplus of grapes, and one of our contract Sauvignon Blanc growers had thirty or forty tons for which he had no home. I told the guy, "We'd like to buy them possibly to make a late harvest-style reserve wine." He let them stay in the vineyard for a couple of weeks unpicked, and they really began to develop a nice noble rot. We picked the crop and made about a thousand cases of this very sweet, 16 percent sugar, 12 and 1/2 percent alcohol wine. We made it again in '86. I think the best one we ever made was probably the '86. We tried to make it once during the late eighties or early nineties, unsuccessfully.

Then in '92, we had a grower who had some unsold Sauvignon Blanc, and again we made the deal with him that we would pay for the pickers, but we wouldn't pay for the actual farming of the grapes until we sold the wine, and we gave him a percentage of the deal, a share of the revenue. It turned out to be another very nice wine.

The problem with these wines is that in California, at least this part of California, the Dry Creek area, the climate is really not conducive to the *Botrytis cinerea*. I think what you need is some rain during harvest, some dampness and rain, followed by a few days of cool, dry weather. Unfortunately, when we have rain here in the fall, before the harvest is completed, it often gets very muggy afterwards. The humidity causes the *Botrytis cinerea* mold to grow in a different way and become Brown Rot, and it can ruin the whole vineyard within about two days. And of course the rain during harvest is bad for the rest of the grapes.

So it's kind of a crap shoot, and it's hard to expect your growers to leave twenty or thirty tons unpicked with the chance that it might develop *Botrytis cinerea* in a positive way, because if it doesn't, you've lost a crop, and you can't do anything with it.

And so what we've started doing now with our own Sauvignon Blanc vineyard is to leave twenty tons unpicked. We did not do it last year just because of the shortage of grapes, but the last time we did it here, I think it was '93 or '94, we left about twenty-

five tons unpicked to try to get the *Botrytis cinerea* mold growing, and after about ten days, it was obvious we were not having much success. So we went ahead and picked the crop, because I didn't want to lose it, and even though the grapes weren't probably quite as nice for a regular Sauvignon Blanc, had they been picked two weeks earlier, they nevertheless became a valuable component and didn't detract from that wine.

I love that style of wine, but again, we don't have the conditions here to really do it, and it's kind of a hit or miss. Chateau St. Jean, Phelps, and Freemark Abbey are three of the wineries that have been more successful with it. They have a slightly different climatic condition there, more conducive to *Botrytis cinerea*, and so far, we can get it growing about every fourth or fifth year.

Dry Creek Valley Appellation Recognized in 1983

Hicke: Now I'm just going to skip around here with a few things that I want to be sure to get. Appellations, I know you were instrumental in getting--

Stare: Yes. Obviously, Dry Creek is in Sonoma County. We actually labeled a couple of our Zins back in the mid-seventies with Dry Creek Valley as an appellation. The BATF approved it, and then they eventually came back and said, "No, we can't approve that name any more."

Hicke: Why?

Stare: It's not a recognized appellation area. But in the early eighties, there was a move afoot all over to try to get more tightly defined appellation areas. I was one of the people responsible for doing that. Most of the actual paperwork and legwork was done by Charles Richard of Bellerose Vineyard, but I certainly was very instrumental in getting it going.

Hicke: What was your goal here, I mean, what were your reasons?

Stare: I think to get more recognition for Dry Creek Valley as a grape growing area. When I came on the scene in 1971, Dry Creek had a long history of grape growing and winemaking, but it was basically unknown; nobody knew of it outside of northern California. Just trying to promote the area and get more recognition was our goal. And I would say over the last four or five years, Dry Creek has finally begun to come into its own and is getting more and more

recognition as a growing area, and certainly having it recognized as an official appellation was important.

Winegrowers of Dry Creek Valley

Stare: Another thing that I think has been very important in Dry Creek Valley is a group of people called Winegrowers of Dry Creek Valley, which is a group of all the wineries and probably about a third of the growers here; we contribute dues in terms of dollars per acre a vineyard or dollars per thousand cases of wine produced.

Winegrowers of Dry Creek Valley sponsored a very, very successful event, the "Passport to the Dry Creek Valley," which is always the last weekend in April; all the wineries have an open house and do something special--have some food and entertainment, and you have vineyard tours, and lectures on T-budding and so forth. It's a valley-wide open house which has become very, very successful. We sell 2,000 passports a year, and they were sold at fifty bucks a piece. It's become a major fund raiser for wine growers of Dry Creek Valley. The net profits of this event--forty, fifty, sixty thousand dollars--are used to promote the Valley.

One of our main ways of promoting it is that we have Press Day every spring, where we'll fly out to the valley half a dozen to a dozen wine press from all over the country, and they'll usually arrive the Thursday night, and stay Friday, Saturday, and go home on Sunday. During that time, they're exposed to the wineries, they're exposed to the vineyards, and it's really gotten the name of Dry Creek Valley out there.

Hicke: You were a founding member?

Stare: I was the second president. Lou Preston was the original president. I will claim that the Passport was my idea. One of the groups that I'm involved in is the Nautical Heritage Society, which owns and operates the tall ship, the *California*, which is a replica of an 1850s revenue cutter. I've been on the board of directors of that group for the last seven or eight years.

They started a passport program right after I went on the board of directors where they had a small book they printed to look like a passport, and if you ever went on the boat, and you had a passport, you'd get your passport stamped. If you went on in Monterey, you'd get the Monterey page stamped; if you went on at Dana Point, you'd get the Dana Point page stamped. We adopted this

for our [Dry Creek Valley] program, and it's been very, very successful. It really is a lot a fun.

Bug Creek Wine Label: Rosé of Cabernet

Hicke: As I said, I'm skipping around here, but I want to hear about the 1992 Bug Creek label.

Stare: Okay. One of our contract growers for Cabernet Sauvignon was a lawyer. This is a vineyard, again, that is one of those that came up for sale fifteen years ago. I thought it was too expensive; I didn't buy it. It's right next to my house. It's eleven acres of Cabernet, and probably the oldest or second oldest planting of Cabernet in Dry Creek Valley--it was planted back in the sixties. It was bought, as I said, by this attorney, and for a number of years the grapes went to another winery, and it was supposedly their best Cabernet. He got tired of hauling the grapes quite a distance to this other winery. I don't know whether he approached us or we approached him, but to deliver the grapes to Dry Creek is a half-mile drive, as opposed to a twenty-mile drive to the other winery; so we started buying the grapes sometime back in the early to mid-eighties.

It was our best single source of Cabernet for a number of years. Unfortunately, the vineyard began to show phylloxera, it was one of the first vineyards around here to show signs of phylloxera, and the quality of the grapes was beginning to go downhill. In 1992, I looked at the contract, and it specified nothing about minimum of sugar levels; normally we will specify a minimum of sugar level in our contract--it was a flaw in the contract. He said, "Well, there's nothing [in the contract] about the quality of the grapes. As far as I'm concerned, you've got to buy the grapes even if they are only 15 percent sugar."

I realized we had a problem there, so we sent him our notification, but we still had to buy the grapes for two more years. I told Larry, I said, "Larry, let's make two wines. Let's make the first picking--on the first pass, let's pick the fruit from the sick vines, the low sugar fruit, and let's pick the better quality fruit on the second picking." So we made two wines from that vineyard. We made the Rosé from the first picking and we made Cabernet from the second picking.

The actual Bug Creek label--I think I came up with the idea. So we designed this label, and we had this kind of stylized, real mean, vicious-looking bug, which bears no resemblance to a

phylloxera. The side label talks about this dreaded beast, it's getting rampant in the vineyard of California, and on the purchase of this wine, the winery will donate 10 percent of the proceeds to the American Vineyard Foundation for vineyard research to solve the problem.

I think the first year we gave seven or eight thousand bucks to AVF or to Davis, and the second year we gave some money, and then we dropped it. After two years, the Bug Creek had kind of run its course. We made one more year of it and just bottled it as Dry Creek Rosé of Cabernet with a regular Dry Creek label. But that Bug Creek got us a lot of publicity.

Hicke: Yes, I was going to ask about that.

Stare: Stories in the *[Wine] Spectator* and all the other trade magazines; public television, PBS, actually sent a film crew out here, and they were probably here for a half a day, and ultimately showed about a three-minute segment. They did a little blurb on the phylloxera problem in California, and about half of it that was shown on TV was shot here at Dry Creek, including a conversation between myself and our vineyard manager and our winemaker, Larry Levin, talking about phylloxera, what it does, and this kind of thing. It was kind of a neat little PR coup.

Hicke: Phylloxera should come along more often? [laughs]

Stare: No, I hope it stays away, it's expensive. We're spending, probably, oh, \$200,000 to \$250,000 a year in replanting due to phylloxera. It will have cost us over a million dollars by the time we are finished.

Hicke: What rootstocks are you replanting on?

Stare: We're going to about four: 110 A, and 5 C, 420 A--those are the ones that come to mind.

Celebrities' Labels

Hicke: Would you tell me about the celebrities' labels? .

Stare: What celebrity labels?

Hicke: The labels of people who have come to visit you--

Stare: Oh, oh, you mean the ones that are autographed?

Hicke: Yes.

Stare: Okay, there's one there from Andy Warhol. There is a big wine tasting every year in New York in March, "A View From the Vineyard" at the Pierre Hotel. We haven't gone for the last four or five years, because it's kind of developed into a mass public drunken event. Unfortunately, when you pay a hundred bucks to go to a wine tasting, you want to drink lots of wine. The guy comes up to your table, and says, "I'll take a taste of your Cabernet," and you pour him a taste. "Wait a minute, I want a glass of Cabernet; I don't want to [just] taste."

Hicke: No spitting [laughter].

Stare: No spitting allowed. You don't spit at the Pierre, the rugs are too deep. Anyways one year, Andy Warhol was there. I was pouring next to my friend, Jim Pedroncelli, and Jim ran over and got Andy's autograph on a bottle of his wine. I decide to get an autographed bottle of Dry Creek. By this time, Andy was kind of walking up the stairs to another part of the ballroom. I ran after him, and ran up the stairs, and tripped and fell. I felt like a complete idiot. But I eventually got up, and went up to Warhol and said, "Andy, will you please sign a bottle of Dry Creek?" He did, and that's what that is. I think that's the only autographed bottle there.

Hicke: Is it?

Stare: Once when I was in San Jose, a few years ago, I bumped into Joe Di Maggio, the famous baseball player at a restaurant in San Jose. I asked Joe if he would autograph a label, and he said no, he would not endorse alcoholic beverages. He did agree to autograph the menu of the restaurant. We have that. I think those are the only two celebrity labels that we have.

Winery Associates Formed 1982

Hicke: And then we have here two other little things. The Winery Associates?

Stare: Yes. We do our marketing in a somewhat unusual way in that [thoughtful pause] our out-of-state marketing is actually done by a separate company called Winery Associates. This is a company that I helped found in 1982.

One of my best friends, probably my best friend now, is fellow named Dave Ready. Dave was one of our first distributors back in

the early seventies. He had a little company called Vintage One Wines, from Bloomington, Minnesota. He was one of the early people in Minnesota to introduce Minnesotans to better California wines. Dave sold our wines from '73 to '78, at which time he sold out to the Ed Phillips Company and became their fine wine manager.

Phillips is a large rectifier, a bottler of private label spirits, and seller of spirits and mass-produced wines in Minnesota, and they wanted to get into the fine wine business. They bought Dave's company, and they became the fine wine division.

This lasted for about five years. Dave was kind of a happy-go-lucky, easy-going guy, unused to kind of a rigid corporate structure. Dave was let go in summer of '82 by Phillips. He had been wanting to move to California, and I said, "Dave, why don't you come out here, and let's figure out what we're going to do with you?"

He moved out here, and we decided to set up a wine marketing company. The original five partners were Dry Creek, Alexander Valley Vineyards, J. Pedroncelli, Preston Vineyards and Winery, and William Wheeler Winery. Dave became our only employee. Initially we had total sales of five million dollars--combined, out-of-state sales of the various wineries. We gradually grew, and we eventually added some other people.

Today two of the original partners have dropped: William Wheeler is out of business. Bill sold his winery to a French company a few years ago, and then, they in turn sold to another French company, and now it's basically out of business. And Lou Preston decided three or four years ago that he wanted to do his own thing, so he dropped out of the marketing company.

We have, since then, added Murphy Goode, who's become a partner member, and Flora Springs from Napa has been a client for the last two years and will become a partner next year. Then we just recently added Quivira Vineyards here in Dry Creek as a client.

Winery Associates has a top-notch salesman on the East Coast, a top-notch guy in the Midwest, Dave in California, and Dave's wife does Hawaii and national accounts. We've got two office people here. We hired a new guy in Texas last year, and we're in the process of hiring a guy to do Colorado, Arizona, and the mountain states. It's been beneficial for all the wineries concerned as it is an economical way to market wines.

Dry Creek--if we didn't have Winery Associates, we would probably have about six or seven more employees. To have a salesman in a territory costs about a hundred grand per person. You've got, probably, a salary of fifty to sixty thousand bucks,

and when you consider his miscellaneous payroll expenses, car allowance, entertainment, and travel, you're talking about a hundred grand per person. At our size, we'd have to have a guy in the Northeast, probably a guy in the Southeast, a guy in the Midwest, a guy in the Southwest, and probably a guy in the Northwest. We'd have to have five sales people plus probably another secretary or two here, and probably a national sales manager. Our overall salary expenses would be a lot higher. Winery Associates offers us a way to share those expenses.

The other nice thing about it is when one of the Winery Associates people goes into the distributing company, where we're all in the same house, you know, you command a lot more respect. For example, we are all with the same distributor in Connecticut; so it's not just the twenty-five hundred cases of Dry Creek they sell. We become then, collectively, for the distributor, a twelve-thousand-case-a-year supplier, which is a lot more important, and they are much more willing to pay attention to us.

As a result, it's been, I think, quite successful. This year we decided to add one more person. We've had a dozen different wineries that want to join our group, and we added one.

I'm surprised more wineries haven't done this type of thing. You have to control your own ego a little, because when one of the salesmen goes in and talks about Murphy Goode wine, why isn't he talking about Dry Creek? But collectively it's worked, I think, by and large, very successfully.

Hicke: How do they differentiate among the wines they represent?

Stare: That's a good question. I don't know. Fortunately, I don't have to answer that. But by and large it has gone along pretty successfully.

Hicke: Yes. That's what counts.

Society of Blancs, 1990

Hicke: What about the Society of Blancs?

Stare: That was a group that was started, again, by myself, probably about five years ago to promote Sauvignon Blanc as a wine. We just felt that Sauvignon Blanc needed more publicity, and more and more wine writers needed to write about it and recommend it; we were hoping we would increase the sales. We, initially, had about thirty-six

wineries that joined and had dues ranging from 500 bucks to 4,000 dollars a year.

We hired a high-powered PR type from the city--I forget his last name--who promptly spent 48,000 bucks a year and offended everybody. We eventually dropped him and decided to do it much more in-house and scale back the dues.

I was the original president of this group and I am now the new president for 1996, but with wine sales booming and the current shortage of S.B. grapes, there is less of an interest in this group.

The group promotes Sauvignon Blanc wine, as I said. We have a person who works part time for the group who hands out press releases to wine writers. It's up to the individual winery to get their wines out. An example of what we do is that we have been called upon by the Wine Institute to do S.B. tastings for foreign buyers. And we've gotten some people to pay a little bit more attention to Sauvignon Blanc, but the organization is fairly inactive now.

Hicke: I wondered if you could tell me about your wife's role here.

Stare: Unfortunately, we're separated.

Hicke: Oh, okay.

Stare: So, that's the end of that. I will admit, one of the problems with the wine business is that if you're going to be successful, you've got to travel a lot.

My first wife--we got divorced in 1977, and I raised both my girls by myself. I had a very good au pair helping me, a live-in nanny.

I got remarried four years ago, and Andrea didn't like the idea of me traveling, so I started to take her with me on trips, and then she didn't like the idea of getting up and catching the seven o'clock plane. "Why do we have to do that?" I said, "Well, dear, this is a business trip, that's what I have to do. You want to come with me, fine, but don't complain about it. If you don't want to come, fine." Things just didn't go very well; we separated six months ago.

Wine Institute

Hicke: Well, one of the things you said you would tell me a little bit about is the Wine Institute, and your part in that.

Stare: Yes. I think the Wine Institute [pensive pause], by and large, is a good organization. A lot of the small-to-medium size wineries feel that it is controlled by Modesto, California, the Gallo company. I have no proof whether it is or not, but I'm sure when one of the Gallos calls, John De Luca, the president, will drop everything and take his calls. When I call to ask John a question, the secretary will say, "Well, he's in a meeting, he'll call you back." He may or may not call me back.

As I mentioned at lunch yesterday, Dry Creek was one of the wineries that brought about the downfall of the California Wine Commission a few years ago. The Wine Commission was a marketing order that developed in the mid-eighties to promote California wines. People had to pay into it dues assessment, based upon gallons shipped or tons shipped or something. I think it was based upon gallons shipped.

##

Hicke: We were just talking about the demise of the California Wine Commission.

Stare: Yes. Anyway, the California Wine Commission would then hire contractors to do their job, and--I'm a little bit fuzzy on the details now--the Wine Commission would contract with the Wine Institute to do something. What it essentially resulted in was mandatory membership in the Wine Institute, because most of the California Wine Commission's funds were being funneled into the Wine Institute to support the Wine Institute's programs.

A lot of us rebelled, and the last time there was a vote on whether to re-install the Wine Commission, it was voted down. Nobody thought it would be voted down, but it meant the demise of the Wine Commission, and it meant that the Wine Institute was going to lose the vast majority of their funding mechanism.

They did some fairly serious soul searching, and I was one of a group of about twenty vintners who was on this soul-searching committee. We met, I think, once a month for six months, usually down at Wente in Livermore, and came up with the current structure and dues rates, which has solved some of the problems. But I still think that when the interests of big wineries and small wineries diverge, the Wine Institute will always side with the big wineries.

Hicke: Is there any kind of solution to this problem?

Stare: Yes. I think the solution is one vote per winery. Now, from that standpoint, Dry Creek has a vote, Gallo has a vote. I'm sure from Gallo's standpoint, because they're a hundred times larger than we are, they want a hundred votes. So I think the ultimate solution might be to have almost kind of a House and a Senate. The Senate, essentially, is one vote per winery, regardless of whether you're a big or a little winery; in the House the voting is based upon size. And what the Wine Institute has done is they have twenty at-large directors--twenty directors that are voted in by one vote per winery--and twenty directors that are voted in by the size of the winery. But it's still stacked, so that probably two-thirds of the directors are from bigger wineries. I don't know if there is a solution.

In the meantime, a lot of the smaller wineries have started a group called Family Winemakers of California. You have to be a family-owned-and-operated winery, although Clos Du Bois is owned by Hiram Walker. I think they are members, but I'm not sure how they get into it, if it is "family-owned wineries."

Family Winemakers of California operates on the state level and is a very effective lobbying organization on the state level. We make no attempt to do anything in Washington. There is a group called the American Vintners Association, AVA, which represents wineries from thirty-seven out of the fifty states, which does have a Washington office and does some fairly effective work on the national level.

AVA and the Wine Institute tend to work together on a lot of things. I'm sure there are times when they have different opinions. On the state level, the Family Winemakers of California and the Wine Institute have been known to work together; they've been known to be against each other on various bills and positions.

One of the areas where, I think, Family Winemakers and the Wine Institute had different opinions was a proposal to increase the taxing on fortified wines. Family winemakers supported this tax increase but we wanted an amendment saying that fortified wines that are bottles with corks and aged for at least two years would be exempt. The reason is, you know, that if you're talking about nice aged port, it's different than some White Lightning or Thunderbird or other wino-type wine.

Gallo and the other large wineries make a fairly significant amount of wine destined strictly for the wino trade, and the idea was to, really, raise the taxes on that, and use that money to fund alcohol research and rehabilitation for the people who have chronic

drinking problems. Gallo, of course, was very much against that, because it would hurt them personally, and yet our position was, "That part of the business should be taxed heavily because of all the damage it causes."

I can recall once when I was visiting with our New Mexican distributor, I said, "What really sells here?" Well, he said, "We sell an awful lot of white port to Indians." But they're making a ton of money living on people's miseries, and that just shouldn't go on.

Changes in Sonoma County and Dry Creek Valley Wine Industry

Hicke: Let's take just a couple of minutes to talk about the changes in the Dry Creek Valley and Sonoma County wine industry.

Stare: Yes. I think one of the things that I mentioned earlier today, or maybe yesterday, one of the big changes that has occurred is that the people who got into the business in the early seventies had a little bit of money and wanted to make money at the wine business, and a lot of people who are getting into it now are much wealthier --the retired business executives, the retired lawyers, doctors-- and to them it's more of a life-style change, and they're not so much interested in making money.

I think another big change, which really is going to affect us all, is the threat of urbanization and how it's going to affect farming. Fortunately, most of the zoning in Dry Creek and Alexander Valley and in the better grape growing areas requires a twenty-acre minimum per dwelling unit. This means that if a twenty-acre parcel comes up for sale, let's say it's vacant, you've got twenty acres of vineyard land, let's say, at 20,000 bucks. Unfortunately, you also have the right to build a house on that property, if no house exists, and that building site is worth a quarter of a million dollars. So it tends to over-inflate the property and make it difficult for someone like myself; I'm not interested in buying a house, I want to buy vineyard property, but that makes the land much more expensive.

Fortunately, Sonoma County does have an open space fund, funded when the voters passed a half-cent increase in the sales tax. This money goes into buying open space. There have been several wineries--De Loach is one that has taken advantage of this fund--they bought a piece of property and then sold the development rights to the county. The vineyard can never be developed.

Hicke: It remains open space?

Stare: Yes. It must remain an open space. I bought this thirty-seven-acre dairy ranch in Windsor, and it is right in the path of development of Windsor. I'm very seriously thinking, once we get it developed, and if it does prove to be a really good vineyard with high-quality grapes, I'm going to consider trying to sell the development rights to the county, so that would be potentially required to be an open space and prevent development around then.

If you looked at Windsor, driving up on the freeway yesterday, ten years ago, none of those houses there existed. That's all the old Landmark Winery property. Fortunately, it's not in Dry Creek yet, not in Alexander Valley, but there's pressure to do it. Whenever you have a house built next to a vineyard, the home owner gets upset if the farmer gets out at five o'clock in the morning and sulfur dusts, or is disking his vineyard on a Saturday and the dust drifts over onto his property. So there is an inevitable conflict, I think, between the residential dwellers and farmers. That is, I think, a potential long-term problem.

I think another problem that affects the entire California wine industry is phylloxera and the effect that it's having on the lessening of the supply of grapes, which means higher grape prices. There are tons and tons of good wines from Chile, Argentina, Australia, and South Africa which would love to come into this country and take our market away from us; so I think that's another potential problem.

Sonoma County Technical Tasting Group

Stare: One of the things that we started, fairly early in the early seventies, was a Sonoma County Technical Tasting Group, where we get together on a once-a-month basis and taste wine and talk about an aspect of winemaking. One thing, I want to tell you one funny story.

Hicke: Great!

Stare: The group is still operating, and it's gotten much more technical now. Besides just tasting wines, we might have someone come and give a lecture on new developments. But, in the early beginning, Lou Foppiano was responsible for putting on a tasting, and he selected the wines, and I was there.

Hicke: Lou Senior?

Stare: Lou Junior. We tasted ten or twelve different Chardonnays. This was in about 1975 or '6. One of them, I thought, was just awful. I didn't recognize it, I didn't know whose it was, and finally, he said, "Dave, why don't you talk about Wine F." I said, "Wine F: this is a badly oxidized wine, possibly there was a major problem at the winery, but the wine is terrible; it should never have been released. It's just awful, and it's oxidized, and it's an unsalable product." Well, it turned out to be our Chardonnay, 1974 Chardonnay, which was a wonderful wine. I was very embarrassed; I said, "Lou, these bottles are not characteristic of the way the wine tastes."

Hicke: It was corked or something?

Stare: No, just oxidized. "Where did you buy these bottles, Lau?" I asked. "Coddentown Wine Cellar," he answered. That explained it. There used to be a wine shop called Coddington Liquors, which at one time was the best wine shop in Sonoma County; but it was notorious for bad storage. The wine had been in his inventory for well over a year. I was so upset, I raced back to the winery, drove back here, went to the library, got three bottles out, and opened all three of them. They were wonderful.

Hicke: [chuckle] Oh, dear.

Stare: There was another tasting that I went to that that same store put on, one of Charles Krug vintage select, reserve Cabernets. Charles Krug used to make some wonderful Cabernets. Actually, the store put the tasting on. I went to it, and the older the wines got, the worse they got. And, again, I'm sure those wines had all been stored at that store. The current vintage was lovely. The next years, the next older vintage, was pretty nice; the second oldest vintage was okay; the older the wines got, the worse they got, and I'm sure that that store just had terrible storage conditions. They store their wines next to the furnace or something.

Hicke: [chuckle] Well, I don't know if that's a good note to end on or not, but I think that's most of what I wanted to ask you about.

Stare: Okay.

Hicke: I thank you so much for devoting all this time to thinking about the past. I know your ideas tend more toward the future.

Stare: Oh, you're very welcome.

Hicke: There we are, unless there is anything more that you would like to mention.

Stare: I can't think of anything.

Hicke: Okay. Again, I thank you very much, it was a very excellent interview.

Stare: Oh, thank you, and you'll be sending me a transcript of it at some time?

Hicke: Yes.

Transcriber: Eric Schwimmer
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Appendix A. Wine Label Samples.



PRODUCED & BOTTLED BY PHIL AWKSIRA CELLARS, HEALSBURG, SONOMA COUNTY, CA



1992
 Rosé of Cabernet Sauvignon
 SONOMA COUNTY
 Alcohol 11.5% by volume

PHYLLOXERA (Fil-lox-er-ah)
 A serious vineyard parasite. This burrowing louse attacks the roots of the vine and eventually kills it. In the latter part of the 19th century, this insect laid waste to major vineyard areas, wreaking millions of dollars of damage.

The lousy louse is on the rampage again! One century later, a mutant strain, phylloxera Type B, is now attacking a previously immune American rootstock. Serious devastation could be a reality.

The offbeat label on this delicious rosé was designed to bring attention to the problems of phylloxera, but despair not! Promising research is now underway with phylloxera resistant rootstocks. Our goal is to donate profit from each bottle of wine to further this phylloxera research. Thank you for your support and enjoy!

CONTAINS SULFITES

GOVERNMENT WARNING: (1) ACCORDING TO THE SURGEON GENERAL, WOMEN SHOULD NOT DRINK ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES DURING PREGNANCY BECAUSE OF THE RISK OF BIRTH DEFECTS. (2) CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES IMPAIRS YOUR ABILITY TO DRIVE A CAR OR OPERATE MACHINERY, AND MAY CAUSE HEALTH PROBLEMS.

Appendix A, cont.



Dry Creek Vineyard

IX WINERY LOGBOOK *Facts & Figures*

Location

Dry Creek Vineyard is located in the heart of Sonoma County's Dry Creek Valley. The ivy-covered stone winery is reminiscent of country chateau-style French architecture.

History

Wines from our first vintage in 1972 were crushed at a bonded winery in Calistoga. Dry Creek Vineyard's original 3,500-square-foot winemaking facility was constructed in 1973. All subsequent vintages have been produced at our winemaking estate.

Wines Produced

Six vintage dated varietals:

Fumé Blanc, Dry Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Old Vines Zinfandel, Merlot

Vintage dated "Reserve" wines:

Reserve Chardonnay, Meritage, Reserve Fumé Blanc. Produced only according to the finest vintages.

Estate Vineyards

Seven estate vineyards, a total of 100 acres, supply approximately 1/3 of our grapes:

Dry Creek Valley

Sauvignon Blanc – 20 acres
Chardonnay – 20 acres
Cabernet Sauvignon – 9 acres
Merlot – 19 acres
Zinfandel – 10 acres

Alexander Valley

Sauvignon Blanc – 15 acres
Chardonnay – 15 acres



Fermentation and Storage Capacities

Approximately 260,000 gallons

Cooperage

Over 3,500 55-60 gallon oak barrels:

60% French (Nevers, Vosges, Limousin);

40% American;

Cooperage is 0 to 5 years;

Average of 20% new barrels each year.

Presses

2 Bucher tank presses (membrane): 10- and 20-ton capacity

Filtration

White wines: diatomaceous earth and membrane

Red wines: diatomaceous earth

Bottling

3,000-4,000 cases per day capacity

Total Capacity

110,000 cases annually

Management

A total of 20 employees, both full- and part-time, work at Dry Creek Vineyard. President/ Winemaker is David S. Stare. Vice President/ Director of Marketing is Kim Stare Wallace. Winemaker is Larry Levin. Vineyard Manager is Duff Bevill. Ranch Manager is Don Wallace. Gary Emmerich is Director of Sales Administration. Linda Honeysett is Office Manager.

Tasting Room

Open daily, 10:30 am to 4:30 pm. Tours for trade by appointment only. Closed on major holidays.

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